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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Curse of the Golden Cross
by G. K. CHESTERTON

Exactly Five Thirty-five
by LAWRENCE TREAT

The Knaves' Messenger
by E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

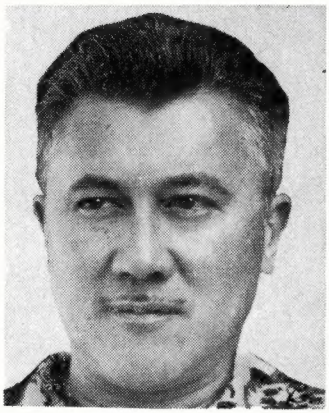
Count of Ten
by BARRY PEROWNE

The Star Producers
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

THE EXECUTIONER'S SIGNATURE
A NEW NOVEL by GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



ONE OF THE trickiest problems in trying to write a "modern" (as the opposite of "period") story is to make it seem up-to-date not only to tomorrow's reader but to the newborn fan who—every author hopes—will be discovering it 20 years hence as a reprint.

The pitfalls are many, and in my time I have fallen into most of them myself with a succession of gorgeous splashes and thuds. One of the worst, of course, is to link a story with any current events. I made one of my finest bloopers of this genre when I set THE SAINT IN NEW YORK uncompromisingly in the era of Prohibition, which certainly makes it a period piece by now, and has frightening implications for those intense and literal-minded students who are determined to deduce the Saint's present age from internal evidence in the Immortal Works. A while after that I tried to get ahead of the game by writing PRELUDE FOR WAR when Hitler was still only a rather funny little man making raucous noises that scared relatively few people. Being obviously incurable, after that war was solidly started, I wrote a book in which the Saint averted a fair facsimile of Pearl Harbor, except that the attack was to be on California instead of Oahu. That is the only story I have written since becoming a professional which never got published: nobody would touch it, because it was too preposterous, and might even offend our good friends, the Japs. This was in the summer of '41. But perhaps I was lucky that time, after all. As a period piece, today, it might have seemed a bit silly.

More recently, in our June '56 issue, I published a bit called THE LOVELORN SHEIK, saying in this space that I felt fairly sure the Middle East would still be in the news when it came out. You know what happened afterwards. So perhaps I feel just slightly nervous about introducing our star story this month, THE EXECUTIONER'S SIGNATURE. For this is laid in the same area—and the author, Major George Fielding Eliot, when he is lucky enough to have a war going on, puts his fictional chores aside and becomes a highly respected military analyst. So if *he* thinks the Middle East will still be timely when this comes out. . . .

I hasten to assure you that the contributions of Chesterton, Oppenheim, Treat, and Perowne are strictly non-prophetic, while Sterling's THE WELL MANNERED MONSTER is true but truly period by a safe 100 years. I have an uneasy feeling that THE STAR PRODUCERS might come true on Broadway any season, but if it does I'll just have to take the rap again. Only please don't any of you send in your birthdays: I am fresh out of horoscopes.

Leslie Charteris

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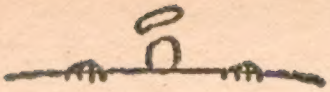

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the executioner's signature

by . . . George Fielding Eliot

Lundy rose to his feet. His brain had cleared itself of the red rage-mist. He knew exactly what he'd do next—if he lived that long....

FRANK LUNDY, regional auditor for Mid-East Petroleum, heaved his skinny frame out of his seat as the plane's wheels hit the packed sand of the landing strip at Al-Qatana. He collected kit-bag and brief case and started up the aisle. Price, the co-pilot—an old friend—came through the cockpit door as Lundy stopped by the exit.

"You're going through with it," he said. It was more a statement than a question.

Lundy nodded.

"You stubborn bastard," muttered Price. "All right. I'll look for you on the up-trip to Basra tomorrow night. And I hope you won't be wearing a wooden overcoat."

Lundy nodded again. The flight steward opened the outer door, which produced about the same result as opening the door of a furnace. Lundy jerked the brim of his battered Panama low over his eyes and stepped out into the blinding sun, already taking note of Mason Carstairs' round ruddy face and crisp white ducks at the foot of the steps.

Major George Fielding Eliot, distinguished military analyst, writer and lecturer, writes about familiar terrain—Arabia, the scene of his authoritative report on the Middle East: HATE, HOPE AND HIGH EXPLOSIVES, 1948, *Bobbs Merrill. In this novel, a very unusual regional auditor hunts for a murderer instead of an oil company's figures. . . . Locale: intrigue-filled Al-Qatana.*

He hoped Carstairs was going to cooperate. Carstairs was field manager for Mid-East at Al-Qatana. He could make things tough for Lundy if he wanted to.

Carstairs' handclasp was hearty enough.

"Glad to see you, Lundy. They radioed from Basra to expect you," he said. "Sorry you had to come down here for such a reason, though. Poor young Fleming—so damned sudden. Well, I've cleared you with the customs, so let's get over to the office where we can breathe. The car's this way."

He was a little too casual. All Lundy needed was one quick look to know that trouble of some kind was churning up in Al-Qatana. Normally, the arrival of the semi-weekly plane from Basra brought half the populace down to the airstrip to stare and gabble. Now there was nobody in sight except a couple of porters, one nervous-looking policeman in a dirty red kaffiyah, and the Levantine chiseler to whom His Highness Sheikh Ibrahim rented out the customs concession. Even the beggars who usually displayed their sickening collection of deformities and fly-bitten sores in front of the Nissen hut which was the "airport's" only building seemed to have business elsewhere this afternoon.

"Where is everybody?" Lundy demanded.

Carstairs didn't seem to hear the question. He opened the door of his Buick, motioned Lundy in ahead of him. The Arab driver didn't trouble himself to get out and take Lundy's bags. He just looked around, grunted and started the car in time to slam Lundy back into the seat good and hard.

Carstairs half-scrambled, half-fell into his place and fell to mopping his streaming forehead. Lundy stared at him in speechless astonishment. He didn't know Carstairs well, but the manager had the reputation of holding a firm hand over the hired help. It wasn't like him to pass up such deliberate carelessness without a word.

"How're things in Basra?" Carstairs asked.

"About the same as usual," Lundy told him. "Our respected chief, General Manager Eccles, has flown over to Beirut to spend a couple of weeks enjoying the cool breezes in his villa on the hillside, but the rest of us manage to exist—thanks to air conditioning."

A thin shrill intermittent noise was coming through the open window of the car—it bothered Lundy. It almost sounded like somebody screaming in agony. The car was moving very slowly through a narrow street, closed in on either hand by blank white walls which had probably been there for five

hundred years. So had the stones of the pavement, what were left of them; the car lurched into a hole, staggered out of it, crept on.

"Your driver is a pearl among Arabs," Lundy remarked. "Most of 'em go slam-bang through a street like this, and the hell with broken axles."

"Not in Al-Qatana," said Carstairs. "Not any more."

He was looking straight ahead; his mouth was set in a straight grim line.

"I suppose," he went on, "you're here to check out poor Johnny Fleming's accounts? So the radio message said, anyway."

"Right," Lundy agreed. This was no time to go into what else he was there for. The driver probably understood English.

The screaming noise was getting louder.

"Sorry about the body," Carstairs remarked. "I got your message saying Johnny's folks wanted it shipped home, but the Sheikh refused to let me disinter it. Some nonsense about the mullahs not liking the idea."

"So?" said Lundy. "Let's leave it for later. What's that yelling? It's getting on my nerves."

"Didn't think you had any," muttered Carstairs.

The car went carefully around a corner, whereupon the screaming grew louder. Ahead, at the end of the street, Lundy could see a considerable crowd. It had been some time since he'd been in Al-Qatana—as he recalled the place, this street led right into the square in front of the Sheikh's palace, an incredibly ancient building which had seen a good many quiet centuries before the oil derricks began to rise among the dunes and the clamorous dredges came to make a channel for the tankers creeping in from the Gulf to suck in the cargoes of black gold that had given Sheikh Ibrahim wealth beyond the dreams of his forebears.

That was a silent crowd—its very silence had an ominous quality. The only sound Lundy could hear was that eerie screaming—no, there was something else—a cracking noise—

"Carstairs," said Lundy sharply, "what's going on there in the public square?"

Carstairs looked at Lundy, started to speak, then flicked a nervous glance at the driver and said nothing. All Lundy could see of the driver was the grayish kaffiyah that covered his head—a head that was held very rigid and still.

They were at the end of the street now, turning right along the edge of the square. There were plenty of people here. They gave way slowly as the car crept along; they scarcely bothered to look either at the car or its occupants, their attention was fixed on what was happening in the

square, from which they were held back by a thin cordon of police and palace guards.

At the corner of the square, there was a gap in the crowd.

Through it, Lundy saw the attraction which had drawn the people of Al-Qatana to this place in the heat of an August afternoon.

In the center of the square, a naked man hung by his wrists from a cross-bar between two uprights. It was he who was screaming—and he had reason to scream. For beside him stood a huge black giant, naked also save for a leopard-skin loincloth, and as Lundy stared in horror, the giant's arm swung in a merciless arc. A long lash curled hungrily around the tormented body of the victim—the screaming lifted to a higher note—

"The justice of Sheikh Ibrahim," said a voice in Arabic.

It took Lundy a moment to realize that it was the driver who had spoken — spoken without turning his head, as though he were addressing his remark to the windshield.

Carstairs said nothing at all.

Lundy thought about the letter he'd had from Johnny Fleming—the letter that had told him, in confidence, that "something's very screwy in Al-Qatana." Johnny hadn't said what he thought was screwy—simply that he meant to find out more about it, through a contact he'd made, and write again. Three days later had come Carstairs' report—Johnny was dead. Sunstroke. Death certificate herewith.

You were right, Johnny, thought Lundy. Something's screwy in Al-Qatana, sure enough. The place begins to give me the creeps.

It was a relief to get out of the car in front of the solid concrete-block building that housed Mid-East's field office. This, at least, was the twentieth century and not the Middle Ages. Carstairs fairly ran up the steps to the door. Lundy was glad to pick up his bags and follow; but he couldn't help one quick glance at the driver. The man had turned his head at last —he was staring after Carstairs with glittering dark eyes.

The field manager's office was a big room, and pleasantly cool, thanks to thick concrete walls and a pair of big electric fans. Being behind his desk seemed to restore Carstairs' equilibrium.

"Sit down, won't you, Lundy?" he invited. "Cigarette?"

"Thanks," said Lundy. "Now about Johnny Fleming—"

"His office," interrupted Carstairs, "was right down the hall here. But surely you're not going to tackle those accounts now? Morning's a better time for that, before the sun's up too high. What you need is a drink and

some dinner and a night's rest. You'll put up with me, of course. Laila'll make you comfortable—ah—I don't think you've met my wife before?"

"Haven't had the pleasure," Lundy said. He hadn't even heard Carstairs was married—the man had been a bachelor the last time Lundy'd been here. "As you say," he went on, "the accounts can wait. But what I want to ask you—"

The door slammed open. A big man in sweat-stained khaki and field boots stormed into the room. His face was dark with unshaven stubble—and with anger.

"Where the hell have you been, Carstairs?" he demanded. "I've been waiting around here since noon. Did you see the Sheikh?"

Carstairs shook his head.

"He wouldn't see me," he answered. "Sent his son out to say His Highness had sworn an oath before Allah that it would damn his soul to break. What could I do, Cassidy?"

"You could remember that our men look to us for protection," snarled Cassidy. "Once we lose their confidence, we're cooked."

"I know that as well as you do," Carstairs retorted. "By the way, I'd like you to meet Mr. Lundy, our regional auditor—Mike Cassidy, superintendent of maintenance, Lundy."

Lundy got up and shook hands. Cassidy grunted acknowledgment. He was still boiling.

"I've got to get out to Camp Three," he rasped. "The news'll be there ahead of me, and I'll have some fast talking to do to keep my lads in line till tomorrow. Let me tell you something, Carstairs—I don't like the way things are going, and I don't like some of the things I hear round and about. If I knew for sure—ah, skip it for now. I'll talk to you later."

He went out, banging the door behind him.

"A hard man to handle, that Cassidy," complained Carstairs. "But he's the best maintenance man on the Gulf. Well—now, where—"

"What happened to Johnny Fleming, Carstairs?" asked Lundy.

"A touch of sun, poor fellow," said Carstairs. "Didn't you see the death certificate?"

"Yes, I saw it," Lundy agreed. "Could I have a word with the doctor who signed it? What was his name?—I couldn't read it clearly."

"Talal ibn Khalid," Carstairs answered. "He's the only physician in Al-Qatana. Unfortunately he's away making his regular rounds of the oases in the interior of the Sheikhdom. But I don't quite see why—look here, Lundy, are you acting for the company in asking these ques-

tions, or is your interest in young Fleming purely personal?"

"Personal," said Lundy. "Johnny Fleming came from my home town. I've known him all my life, and his family too. It was my big mouth, during my last home leave, that got him all fired up to come out to this stinking country. He talked me into getting him a job on the auditing staff. Then when he got bored with Basra, nothing would do but he must get a field job—and just then the accountant's billet here fell vacant, when Yarrow was promoted, so I sent Johnny along to you. Now he's dead. Do you wonder I want to know the details?"

Carstairs was looking very solemn.

"No," he agreed. "I don't wonder. But—"

He paused, apparently at a loss for the right words.

"Johnny was tough as rawhide," said Lundy. "Also he'd acquired a healthy respect for the sun in these parts. I don't think he died of sunstroke. Did you see his body afterward?"

"Yes—that is, not exactly, but—" again Carstairs fumbled.

"Why can't the body be shipped home?" asked Lundy softly.

"I told you—the Sheikh had trouble with the Ulema—" began Carstairs.

"Not good enough," cut in Lundy. "I've been in this area a long time, Carstairs. No Arab priest—or Sheikh either—would care a copper piaster what happened to the body of an infidel dog of a Christian. That may go down with General Manager Eccles, because he's new out here. It doesn't go down with me. Neither does the sunstroke yarn. I want the facts. Now."

Carstairs' face flushed a shade redder.

"All right, Lundy," he said. "What I'm going to tell you is in strict confidence. Is that understood?"

"No," said Lundy. "Not if by that you mean covering up—"

"Don't be a fool," Carstairs interrupted. "There's nobody to cover up. I'm thinking of the company's interests. So must you. The truth is, Johnny Fleming died of the plague, and the Sheikh had his body buried secretly in order to avoid a panic in the town. Furthermore, as you'll be aware, it couldn't be shipped anywhere in any case."

"I see," murmured Lundy. "But if the plague's in Al-Qatana, why's the only doctor making a tour in the interior?"

"It was an isolated case," Carstairs said. "Probably Johnny got it from a sailor on one of the tankers—anyway there were not any others."

"Um," said Lundy. "But of course Johnny might have spread the infection himself—naturally you'd radio to Basra for a com-

pany doctor and have all the employees inoculated?"

Carstairs was two shades redder by this time.

"And start a panic for certain?" he snapped. "That was what the Sheikh wanted to avoid."

"So to please His Highness," suggested Lundy, "you risked your own life, and your wife's, and the lives of every Mid-East employee in Al-Qatana?"

Carstairs' fist crashed on the desk.

"Dammit, man," he growled, "it's necessary to please His Highness right now. Do you realize that tomorrow is the last day for re-negotiating our concession? Sheikh Ibrahim is free under the terms of the agreement to cancel us out, unless we agree on terms by noon tomorrow. And do you realize how much oil our survey teams have located in the back-country of this Sheikhdom since January first? Al-Qatana's another Kuwait—a gold mine, Lundy. So of course I'm trying not to cross up the Sheikh."

He sounded sincere. Lundy had met others with just that sort of single-track mind: no room in it for anything but oil. The Basra grapevine had reported that Carstairs had been plenty upset when Eccles had come out from New York to take the General Manager's job: he'd thought he was in line for it himself. Maybe he was still working for it—getting this concession renewed would be a feather in his cap, certainly. Others would be glad to cut in on Mid-East at Al-Qatana — the International Oil Syndicate people, for instance. Probably the old Sheikh was threatening to dicker with them, holding out to the last minute on Mid-East in the hope of getting a bigger take. It added up—

That is, it added up if Carstairs was telling the truth about the concession. The terms of the Al-Qatana concession had never been made public: in Mid-East's inner circle, only a few people knew the full story, and Lundy wasn't a member of the inner circle. But one thing he did know, as his mind came round to it.

If the deadline for re-negotiating the concession were actually coming up tomorrow, with the decision still hanging fire, Eccles would never have gone off to Beirut for a holiday. Eccles might be short on local experience, but he was a good oil man. And he was the only man who had the final authority to put Mid-East's name on the dotted line. He might leave the actual negotiating to Carstairs, but he'd never budge from Basra and the radio, while a matter of this importance hung in the balance. He wouldn't dare.

So Carstairs was still lying.

But he was lying dangerously. Tomorrow night Lundy'd be on the plane for Basra again. Carstairs knew that. He also knew that it would be Lundy's duty to report this conversation to Eccles, or to Herndon, Eccles' assistant. If what he had said wasn't true, Carstairs would be in hot water—he'd have no excuse for not taking proper precautions about a plague case unless he could plead the overriding interest of the company in the concession as his justification.

Yet he had lied, knowing that Lundy would report his words.

The implication hit Lundy right between the eyes. Something was going to happen before tomorrow night which would relieve Carstairs of any anxiety about what Lundy might report in Basra. Or else something was going to happen to Lundy before tomorrow night. Maybe the same something that had happened to Johnny Fleming.

Experience had taught Lundy that crooks always tried to cover up when they saw that the auditor was becoming suspicious—and generally gave themselves away by doing so. In such a case, a smart auditor could often goad the thief into complete self-betrayal by putting on pressure in various ways.

Maybe a talk with Cassidy was indicated. Cassidy had said something about tomorrow, too. Cassidy was tough—he wouldn't yield to pressure—but he might explode under it.

It had taken Lundy's analytical mind about ten seconds to think this through.

"As Cassidy says, skip it for now," he remarked. "You seem to have troubles enough of your own without my adding to 'em."

Carstairs nodded. Watching him carefully, Lundy couldn't be sure whether or not the manager was relieved at his words. All Carstairs said was:

"Glad you understand that, Lundy. Operating and auditing are a little different at times. Well, there's nothing more for me here this afternoon. Come along: Laila'll be glad to see you."

The car was waiting—with a different driver at the wheel, who proved no less cautious than the other. Lundy had never seen Arab drivers who had such an affection for low gear and fifteen-mile-an-hour crawling as this Al-Qatana breed. It took twenty minutes to reach Carstairs' bungalow — a standard Mid-East ranch-type job, Class A (senior executives).

The door opened as Lundy got out of the car, and he forgot about the house and the creeping driver. The woman who stood in the doorway would have made him forget even Johnny Fleming, if anything

could have done that. He could not have said quite what he expected Mrs. Carstairs to be like —probably something on the order of the members of the Mid-East Ladies' Club in Basra —certainly not this slim, sultry beauty with the proudly lifted chin and great dark eyes that looked scornfully on a world in which, Lundy instantly sensed, Laila Carstairs had found little either to admire or to enjoy. There was a touch of the East in her high cheekbones and olive-tinted skin — she might have been a princess stolen from the pages of the Arabian Nights save for the simple white dress and high-heeled white slippers which most certainly had come from nowhere east of the Rue de la Paix.

"You are early, Mason," she said. There was no question in her voice; rather it conveyed complete indifference as to whether her husband came home early, or late, or at all.

"I've brought Mr. Lundy to stay the night, my dear," Carstairs informed her. "I was sure you'd be glad to hear the latest gossip from Basra."

"I'm glad to make Mr. Lundy welcome, and I'm sure he's too tired for gossip in this heat," said Mrs. Carstairs. "Do come in, Mr. Lundy—I'll have Misfer bring your bags."

She led the way into a long living room, furnished with taste and simplicity. Carstairs followed, saying something about gin slings.

"Rhine wine and soda for me, if you have it," Lundy announced. "Too hot for hard liquor."

He had an affection for gin slings, but he meant to keep a clear head tonight. He was oddly gratified when Laila Carstairs glanced at him approvingly. Too bad she had to see him in this rumpled gabardine suit — he chuckled inwardly as he realized what he was thinking. Frank Lundy was no ladies' man: he didn't have the equipment, and he had sense enough to know it. His scrawny sun-dried body had no attraction for the roving female eye. When he needed a woman, he used her and forgot her. For the rest, he let the youngsters fresh out from the States compete for the favors of the secretarial staff. Johnny Fleming had done well at that game—

He wasn't going to think about Johnny Fleming right now.

For just a minute or so he was content to sit here in a big comfortable rattan chair, with ice tinkling in his glass, and watch Laila Carstairs moving quickly about the room.

"Lord's sake, Laila, light somewhere," grumbled Carstairs, absorbing half his gin sling at one gulp.

She swung round to face him.

"Prince Abd-el-Kader was here a little while ago," she said. "That young man makes me nervous."

"Ha," snorted Carstairs. "It'd take more than the Sheikh's youngest brat to make you nervous, my dear. What'd he want?"

"To see you," he said. Laila answered. "Of course he didn't come in when he found you weren't home."

"Not done in these parts," chuckled Carstairs. "Too bad. I'm sure he would've liked—"

"Mason," murmured Laila.

No warning, no reproof in her tone, but Carstairs didn't pursue the subject except to mutter something about "damned impudence, coming here in broad daylight"—

Or had he said "imprudence"? Lundy couldn't be sure.

"What brings you to Al-Qatana, Mr. Lundy?" Laila was asking.

"Nothing pleasant, I'm afraid, Mrs. Carstairs," he told her. "I'm the regional auditor, and I have to go over Mr. Fleming's books and bring them up to date, ready for his successor."

"He was a fine young man," she said, a touch of warmth coming into her voice. "We all liked him here. It went to my heart when Mason told me—" She left the sentence unfinished. Lundy was getting a little weary of unfinished remarks: there seemed to be an epidemic of them in Al-Qatana.

"He was a fine young man, as you say, Mrs. Carstairs," he agreed. "I'd known him all my life. In a way, I feel responsible for what happened to him; he was one of my juniors, I sent him here. It won't be fun writing to his people."

"No," half-whispered Laila Carstairs. She was looking at Lundy with a queer intensity. "No," she repeated. "That will not be pleasant for you."

She could hardly have made her meaning clearer if she'd put it in plain words—"And it would be still less pleasant if you knew what I know."

"Laila, my dear, I think—" began Carstairs.

An Arab servant came silently into the room.

"The car arrives with the Prince Abd-el-Kader," he said.

Mason Carstairs jumped up from his chair.

"What the hell—" he began.

"The impulsiveness of youth, I think you once called it," smiled Laila. Her eyes were not smiling.

Carstairs strode to the door, which the servant was opening.

"I trust," said a voice from the threshold, "I do not intrude upon a private discussion?"

Prince Abd-el-Kader, youngest son of Sheikh Ibrahim of Al-Qatana, looked a lot more like a Broadway playboy than

an Arab prince, to Lundy's way of thinking, except for his turban. He was wearing a smart sharkskin suit: dazzling teeth flashed in his sun-browned face as he bowed over Laila's hand. The fingers that gripped Lundy's as the two were introduced were wiry and firm. His English was pure Oxonian.

"Do not let me interfere with the festivities," he begged, nodding toward the cocktail table. "Indeed I would be happy to join you, but alas, my respected father and the reverend Ulema would be distressed. Perhaps in Basra one day—"

He looked at Laila and grinned. Impudent was right. The guy was carrying a torch for Laila right where her husband could see it. If I was Carstairs, thought Lundy, I'd boot this lad straight out the door. But maybe I wouldn't either—if I was Carstairs.

"There is one small matter—" the Prince was saying to Carstairs.

"Will you excuse us a moment, Laila? Lundy?" asked Carstairs. "My study's this way, Prince."

The Prince grinned at Laila again.

"My duties as wazeer to the Sheikh my father are often irksome," he remarked. "But never more than now, when the need for talking of business deprives me of the delight of your presence, even for a few moments."

He and Carstairs moved away, their heads close together. As the study door closed on them, Lundy heard the Prince say:

"Now about tomorrow—"

Tomorrow again.

"So the Prince is his father's wazeer," he observed. "Unusual for the youngest son to have such responsibility. How many sons has the Sheikh altogether?"

"Four," said Laila.

"Aren't the elder brothers jealous of this young fellow?"

"The quality of Prince Abd-el-Kader's ambition," said Laila, deadpan, "is such as to convince his elder brothers that foreign travel is beneficial to their health."

"Meaning they're afraid of him," mused Lundy. "And so are you, Mrs. Carstairs. Why?"

Her eyes widened.

"You are very observant, Mr. Lundy," she stalled.

"A habit of auditors," he told her.

Outside, the quick-coming Arabian twilight was shadowing the desert.

"I don't think, Mr. Lundy, that I can find words that I care to use to explain why I am afraid of Prince Abd-el-Kader," Laila Carstairs said slowly. A queer little shiver went up Lundy's spine.

"You're an Englishwoman, aren't you? There's a British political agent at Bahrein," sug-

gested Lundy. Now why had that remark jumped up in his throat?

"Unfortunately, Mr. Lundy," said Laila, "I am not British. In law, I am a subject of His Highness, the Sheikh of Al-Qatana."

"What!" snapped Lundy.

"I was born here," Laila told him. "My father was an antiquarian, who spent his life exploring the ruins of forgotten civilizations—until the East absorbed him. He was an Englishman by birth, but he dressed and lived as an Arab, and he became a Moslem and a subject of Sheikh Ibrahim as a matter of choice. My mother was Arab. It was she who insisted that I go to school in England: but she could not give me back the English birthright that my father had abjured. Now do you understand why I am afraid of the Sheikh's favorite son?"

"But—but good God!" gasped Lundy. "You're the wife of an American citizen—you're entitled—"

"I am Mason Carstairs' wife by a Moslem ceremony only, Mr. Lundy," she said as he paused to find better words. "Therefore, the law of Islam permits him to break the tie merely by saying 'I divorce you' three times and showing me the door."

"The company," said Lundy, "wouldn't care for that."

"Which is one reason why it hasn't happened already," Laila retorted. "But not the only reason."

Her manner warned Lundy that asking for the other reason wouldn't get him very far. Anyway there was something else he had to know; and he hadn't much time—Carstairs and the Prince might be back any moment.

"Did Johnny Fleming know about all this?" he asked.

A faint hint of color touched the high cheek-bones.

"Yes," she said, scarcely above a whisper.

So that was how it had been. Ten to one, Laila Carstairs was the "contact" through whom Johnny had hoped to get more information about what went on in Al-Qatana.

Maybe she'd trusted Johnny. She didn't quite trust Lundy—not yet, anyway. He whipped Johnny's letter from his pocket.

"Read this. Quick," he begged.

It wasn't a long letter. She'd finished it, and Lundy was just stowing it away again when the study door opened. Carstairs and Prince Abd-el-Kader emerged, chatting cherrily about horses.

"Do forgive us for being so long," Carstairs begged. "Laila, Mr. Lundy's glass is empty. I hope you haven't been boring him with your social service nonsense."

Laila tapped slender fingers over the faintest trace of a yawn.

"On the contrary," she murmured, "I have been acquiring an encyclopedic knowledge of the difficulty of teaching Arab clerks the fundamentals of American accounting methods."

The Prince laughed.

"Were I fortunate enough to be left alone with a jug of wine and you beside me, I could have entertained you more acceptably," he remarked. "As perhaps the favor of Allah may—but enough of dreams. I'll take your advice about the stallion, Carstairs. Until tomorrow, then. Good evening, Mrs. Carstairs. A pleasure, Mr. Lundy."

He was moving toward the door, Carstairs in attendance.

A suave and accomplished young man—who knows exactly what he wants and means to have it, thought Lundy. And will stop at nothing to remove any obstacle from his path. Johnny Fleming, for instance.

Also he had said—"Until tomorrow." That made twice he had spoken about tomorrow.

Carstairs and the Prince were at the door, talking low-voiced.

Lundy took a calculated risk—

"If I wanted to see Mike Cassidy this evening, Mrs. Carstairs, where would I find him?" he said in a tone that wouldn't carry across the room.

Her eyes widened—with surprise or some other emotion.

But her voice was steady as she answered:

"Quarters Five — a small square bungalow about a mile straight along the road to the right. You can't miss it: it's just beyond the company filling station."

"Thanks," was all he had time to say before Carstairs was back calling for another gin sling and inquiring whether dinner was going to be ready in time to keep hard-working oil men from starving to death.

On almost any other occasion, Lundy would have relished that dinner. Laila Carstairs might be Arab born but her ideas about dinner were strictly European. Lundy hadn't eaten such food in a couple of years—there wasn't a restaurant in Basra whose chef could come within miles of it, let alone the company commissary. Laila herself ate in complete silence, except for an occasional word to a servant. Carstairs, though, seemed convivial — he kept pressing whiskey and conversation on Lundy, so in self-defense Lundy had to keep on drinking Rhine wine and soda and trying to talk when he wanted to think. All Carstairs talked about was penny-ante company chit-chat, but there was an undercurrent of excitement in his manner which wasn't diminished by Scotch on top of gin slings. Lundy was glad to see the coffee service

coming in. Now, maybe, he could get off to his room, and figure how he was going to make contact with Cassidy. The maintenance boss knew something about tomorrow—and maybe about Johnny Fleming, too.

Laila, sipping coffee, said:

"Mason, you haven't forgotten we're due at the Killingsley's for bridge in half an hour?"

"Can't we get out of it?" rasped Carstairs. "I'm in no mood for bridge."

"Hardly, on such short notice."

"But what about our guest?" Carstairs wanted to know.

"An extra man at a bridge party's a damned nuisance," Lundy put in. "I've some papers in my brief case I'd be glad to run through, then I'll hit the hay."

Carstairs didn't look at all pleased: Lundy got the idea the manager wasn't happy at leaving him alone. But Laila rose at once.

"You're tired, of course, Mr. Lundy," she said. "Your room's right along the gallery here. May I show you the way?"

The desert stars glowed in the dark sky beyond the edge of the gallery roof as Lundy followed Laila through the shadows. A dim light burned behind a screen door.

"Here you are, Mr. Lundy," she said brightly. At the dining room door, a cigarette-end glowed: Carstairs was standing there, listening.

"I think Misfer has everything in order," Laila went on. "Just let me make sure."

She stepped inside the bedroom, spoke swiftly through half-parted lips:

"We'll have to take the car. Jeep in the garage. Ali will drive you—I've told him. You'll find a present in your kit-bag."

The next second she was out on the gallery saying "Good night," to Lundy, and "I'm coming, Mason," to Carstairs.

Quite a girl, she was.

Lundy wished he knew just what her little game might be.

This story of her being married to Mason Carstairs by a Moslem ceremony stuck in his throat. Was she a Moslem herself? If so, the law of Islam would forbid her marriage to an unbeliever. Of course there were ways of getting around the law in Moslem countries as well as in others. And apparently she was accepted by the American community in Al-Qatana as Mrs. Carstairs, period. But still—oh, worry about that later, Lundy.

He unzipped his kit-bag. A .45 automatic lay on top of his folded underwear.

Uh-huh, Lundy. Quite a girl. Now who does she figure I'm likely to shoot? Cassidy? Prince Abd-el-Kader? Or her ever-loving husband? Or is she just being thoughtful of my welfare?

He made sure the safety was on, stuck the gun inside the waistband of his trousers, sat down at a table and spread out his brief case. Carstairs might show up for a last word. But he didn't—presently, Lundy heard the car in the driveway, heard the voices of Laila and Carstairs —a door slammed, a motor's sound diminished.

Two minutes later, Lundy walked briskly across the gallery and headed for the garage. The building was dark; nobody seemed to be there.

"Ali!" said Lundy into the black archway. No answer. But the jeep was there: Lundy could see the gleam of starlight on polished metal. If the keys were in it, he'd drive himself. The keys were in the lock. Lundy climbed into the driving seat, pressed the starter, and headed for the road.

At least he wouldn't have to proceed at the pace which Arab drivers in Al-Qatana appeared to favor. He stepped the jeep up to a bustling 40, happy to be alone with his thoughts for a minute or two. The lights showed him a gravel road—a company-built road, made for heavy-duty oil trucks: it was far superior to the streets of the town. Suddenly, at the edge of the road, a shadow moved—knowing Arab ways, Lundy threw out the clutch and put his weight on the foot-brake, just as the figure of a man lurched into the path of the lights. Gravel scrunched under the locked tires. The lurching figure stopped, seemed to hesitate, then swayed toward the jeep's left fender. Lundy twisted the wheel; the jeep's remaining momentum swung it away from the man, leaving him standing there untouched in the starlight.

"Son of ten generations of mangy she-camels!" rasped Lundy in furious Arabic. "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

A step grated on gravel at the edge of the road behind the jeep. The man who had been so near to injury or death jerked back his head—then turned and ran full speed straight down the road, his djellaba fluttering behind him. Lundy's left hand jumped to the switch of the spotlight; his right moved toward the gun. The spotlight's beam leaped out, swung left and back, came to rest on two men advancing toward the jeep —men who wore the loose khaki uniforms and red kaffiyahs of the Sheikh's police.

"You have injured that man, effendi," said one of the policemen. He sounded like a child dutifully repeating a half-learned lesson.

Lundy laughed.

"So that he runs down the road with the speed of a gazelle?" he jeered.

"The effendi speaks truth," said the other policeman.

The two policemen looked at each other and then back at Lundy. Bewilderment was written large on their brown faces.

"Do you have anything more to say to me?" snapped Lundy.

"Nay, billah," muttered one of the policemen. "May the effendi's merits endure."

"Allah keep thee," Lundy replied politely. He snapped off the spotlight, put the jeep in gear and trundled away.

He drove carefully and slowly now, made cautious by his experience.

Presently his lights picked up a dark square building to the right of the road—beyond, as he passed it, the pumps of a filling station appeared, and beyond that again, set back from the road, a rectangle of yellow light—a window. He swung the jeep into a gravel drive, its lights sweeping across the front of a neat bungalow. It was only a step to the door.

"Who's there?" called a deep voice in answer to his knock.

"Lundy."

A light flicked on overhead: the door opened, framing Cassidy's heavy bulk.

"I had a hunch you'd be along," the maintenance super rumbled. His eyes went past Lundy to the jeep. "Where's your driver?"

"I drove myself," Lundy answered.

"What!" roared Cassidy. "Why, you damn' fool, don't you know — didn't Carstairs warn you—come in, for God's sake. Come in, sit down and have a drink. If you don't need one, you ought to."

Cassidy's huge hand was shoving Lundy into a chair.

"But what—" Lundy began, completely bewildered.

Cassidy faced him, fists on hips.

"Didn't Carstairs tell you that he's issued strict orders that on pain of instant dismissal no American employe of the company is to operate any motor vehicle in Al-Qatana—not even so much as to back a car into a garage?"

"No," said Lundy. "He said nothing of the sort to me. What's the idea?"

"The idea is," Cassidy told him grimly, "that old Sheikh Ibrahim has sworn on oath that whenever one of his subjects suffers injury from a car, truck or jeep, the driver of the vehicle, whoever he may be, gets a public flogging—fifty lashes on the bare back."

"My God!" said Lundy. "But he wouldn't dare flog an American?"

"Why not?" retorted Cassidy. "He's the law here—and the nearest U. S. consul's at Dhahran, too far off to do much good.

You're just damn' lucky you didn't have any trouble on your way here."

Lundy's blood was chilling in his veins.

"I almost did," he said, and told Cassidy what had happened on the way.

Cassidy's face went rock hard as he listened.

"It was a plant," he growled. "You see that, don't you? This jasper trying to knock himself against the fender—and the two cops right there— Who knew you were going to be driving along that road tonight? Carstairs?"

"*Mrs.* Carstairs," said Lundy reluctantly.

"Hm. That doesn't figure—or maybe it—anyway, she might've told her husband. How long ago did she get to know your plans?"

"About two hours. I spoke to her before dinner—asked her where you lived."

"The hell you did. Well, two hours was plenty of time to rig the deadfall. If that rascal had not lost his nerve and run for it, the cops would've sworn you hit him whether you did or not, and made him back 'em up. But with no victim to show, they were sunk. The saints were with you tonight, Lundy. Let's have that drink. Straight rye okay with you?"

"Make it a stiff one," agreed Lundy. "I need it, all right. I saw that poor devil in the square this afternoon—"

"He was one of my truck drivers," snarled Cassidy. "He hit a camel turning a corner in the town—the rider fell off and got a few bruises. No matter. Fifty lashes. The Sheikh's sworn an oath before Allah. Here—that stiff enough? To hell with all Sheikhs."

He took a long pull at his glass.

So did Lundy. The whiskey went to the right place. The chilly fingers that gripped his heart relaxed. His pressure tactics were getting results. A little more pressure, and probably he could get himself murdered.

"What I don't see is why Carstairs—or anyone—would want to make me the fall guy for a public flogging," he said.

"You know the answer to that better'n I do," Cassidy answered. "F'r instance, you didn't come here to my house to talk about auditing young Fleming's accounts."

"No," Lundy admitted. "I came to talk about how Johnny Fleming died."

"I thought maybe that was it," said Cassidy. "I've heard about you, Lundy. People come back and forth from Basra all the time. The talk is, Frank Lundy's all brain and no heart—not a soft spot in him anywhere, except maybe for Johnny Fleming."

"He—he was sort of like a kid brother," muttered Lundy. "I never had a kid brother."

Cassidy nodded.

"I know. There was a kid once in Kuweit—never mind." His voice hardened. "I can't help you, Lundy."

"Johnny Fleming didn't die of sunstroke," Lundy said, his eyes steady on Cassidy's face. "He died because he knew something. Who killed him, Cassidy?"

"Not me, if that's what you're getting at," snapped Cassidy. "How do you know he knew something? What kind of something?"

There was an edge of anxiety in the heavy voice.

Silently Lundy handed the superintendent Johnny Fleming's letter.

Cassidy read it, passed it back, poker-faced.

"Maybe the lad was having some kind of pipe-dream," he suggested. "He didn't know this country any too well. He could have been letting his imagination run away with him."

"You don't believe that, Cassidy," murmured Lundy.

Cassidy tossed off the rest of the rye in his glass and set the glass down with a bang.

"What if I don't?" he rasped. "What if I don't want to know too much about what happened to Johnny Fleming, because if I did it might gag me? And make me chuck away the one chance I've ever had to make big money out of this lousy oil business? Twenty years—outside of the time I was driving a tank for Georgie Patton—I've been drawing pay checks from oil companies and watching other men get rich. And where am I today? Still working for fat guys sitting in director's offices in New York while I live here with the fleas and the Bedu. So now there's a melon to be cut and for once I've got a knife in my hand. Does that make sense to you, Lundy?"

"Plenty," said Lundy. "I've been drawing pay checks for twenty years, too. I've had the same ideas you have. Not once, but a dozen times. They never jelled. And I don't think they'd ever have included conniving at murder."

Cassidy bounced to his feet.

"Neither would I connive at murder!" he roared. "Damn you, Lundy, that's what I'm telling you! A man can't connive at a murder he doesn't know about. I don't want to know what happened to Johnny Fleming. And I won't help you find out. I'm going to phone the motor pool for a driver to take you back to Carstairs' house—I can't talk to you any longer, I've got things to do."

"Going back to Camp Three to get ready for tomorrow?" Lundy inquired.

Cassidy stood quite still, half turned toward the telephone: his eyes were steel-hard as he looked back at Lundy.

"What do you know about Camp Three?" he grated.

"Heard you mention it to Carstairs," said Lundy. "You said something about tomorrow, too. Any reason why I shouldn't have asked?"

Cassidy still stared at him with those unfriendly eyes.

"No, guess not," he grumbled. "Camp Three's off limits for most Mid-East employes, that's all, and for everyone else. You can guess why."

"Struck oil in a big way, eh?" suggested Lundy. Somehow he didn't believe that was the answer.

Cassidy nodded, picked up the telephone, dialed and spoke a few curt words in Arabic.

"Driver'll be here in five minutes," he announced. "The motor pool barracks is just down the road."

"Thanks," smiled Lundy, getting to his feet, "I don't think I'd care to drive that jeep again right now. What got into the Sheikh, anyhow, to issue such an order? Sounds as if he's trying to make it tough for us, but that hardly makes sense, what with the royalties he's getting."

"You just keep on asking questions, don't you?" grumbled Cassidy. "Could be he wants to up the ante, couldn't it?"

There came a light tap at the door.

"There's your driver," Cassidy announced. He opened the door, spoke in Arabic to a shadowy figure outside:

"Ali, drive this man to effendi Carstairs' house. Stay the night there."

A grunt of assent was the only answer.

"Good night," said Lundy.

"It'll be a better night for you if you stay put when you get where you're going," Cassidy retorted.

As Lundy went out, the light from the door fell for an instant on the face of the waiting driver. He was the same man who had driven Carstairs and Lundy from the airport to the company office: the man who had spoken so bitterly of the justice of Sheikh Ibrahim. And his name was Ali.

Climbing into the jeep, Lundy said in his careful Arabic:

"You should have waited for me at the effendi Carstairs' garage, Ali. I did not then know of the Sheikh's new edict: therefore when I did not find you, I drove the jeep here myself. This might have caused me difficulties."

Ali had swung the jeep into the road before he answered:

"Effendi Carstairs came and told me to wait no longer, that you would not require me as his wife had said."

"No matter," murmured Lundy. "Yet I would not have cared to experience the justice of Sheikh Ibrahim."

After a moment Ali muttered: "He was my younger brother."

"The man who was flogged this afternoon?" asked Lundy with quick understanding. "I am sorry. I can understand how you feel. There was one whom I loved as a younger brother who is now dead. Perhaps you knew him—his name was Fleming."

"Aye, billah, I knew him," said Ali. He did not continue. Direct questions are rarely helpful in getting information from Arabs: Lundy switched to another tack.

"Strange," he remarked, "that the Sheikh should do this thing, which not only harms poor men like your brother but provides difficulties for the company which brings Ibrahim such wealth."

"He is aged and priest-ridden," growled Ali, "and wealth means the less to him when every day brings him nearer the grave that awaits his body—and the fires of Eblis that, as the Ulema tell him, await his soul because he brought the infidel oil company here in his greed for gold."

"I see," murmured Lundy. "Therefore he seeks to drive the oil company away, thus making his peace with Allah."

"Perhaps," said Ali. "Or perhaps he seeks only to quiet the clacking priest-tongues for a little while, until he considers how he can satisfy both the needs of his soul and the demands of his greedy son. In any case, my younger brother has been flogged like a dog. For which, as Allah sees me, there will one day be a reckoning."

"And my younger brother is dead," said Lundy. "For which, as Allah sees me, there will one day be a reckoning also."

"Aye, billah," snarled Ali. "On that day I shall shoot that black man in the stomach and sit beside him while he dies slowly on the sand."

There was the Arab mind for you: Ali's dream of vengeance was directed against the man who had flogged his brother, rather than the Sheikh who had ordered it done.

"The black man is a slave who obeys," Lundy suggested.

"Aye. He is a slave," said Ali. "The slave dealers from the Hadramaut come here in their dhows, now that the Sheikh has much gold. They bring him pale-skinned girls for his toothless fumbling and tall black men to be his zkirts and guard his Palace. Also they brought this man of the whip, Hamad, for whom it is said in the bazaar they exacted a great price, because Hamad—may Allah blight him—was once chief executioner

to a Sultan. But the British—whom may Allah also blight, they being oppressors of the poor—came and drove the Sultan out, so that he had to sell his slaves to get money on which to live in his exile. Thus came Hamad and his whips to this place. But it is also whispered in the bazaar that the Sheikh did not wish to buy Hamad, saying that the palm-rods of his fathers were well enough for such flogging as must be done; thereafter his son persuaded him, urging that the terror of Hamad's whips of hide would put the fear of Allah in the hearts of evil-doers."

"We're almost back to Carstairs' house," Lundy said. "Stop a minute, I am eager to hear more of this Hamad."

Ali, well launched in his tale, was happy to oblige.

"Aye, billah, you do well to listen, for Hamad is a terrible man. His whips are made of the hide of the river-hog"—Lundy remembered that river-hog is the Arab name for the hippopotamus, wherefore its flesh is forbidden to Moslems—"and he can use them equally well with his right hand or his left. It is his custom to give half the required number of lashes with one hand, and half with the other. Thus half the stripes cross the other half in an ordered pattern, like the lattice of a window. This Hamad calls 'the signature of Hamad'; it is his pride to boast that he has signed his name on a thousand backs. Also he has many different whips—one with which he can draw blood at the first blow, and another with which he can raise the skin on a man's back so that it makes a great quivering jelly from the blood that is within it, without a drop appearing on the surface. Such a man dies in three days. Then there is another whip which has at its tip a little curved knife, very sharp, in the shape of a flat hook. Hamad can make this whip curl round the body, so that the little hooked knife cuts the flesh of the belly as he draws the lash away. It is said that five strokes only are required ere the bowels of the condemned are hanging to his knees. These are the final strokes, after the rest of the punishment has been suffered. But this is bazaar talk, and one can hear anything in the bazaar: doubtless it is not true, for surely Allah would punish one who was guilty of such cruelty."

Which was, as Lundy well knew, a back-handed way of saying that Ali had some reason to believe the dreadful tale.

"I hope," he said, "the black devil didn't use anything like that on your brother."

"Nay," said Ali. "It was an ordinary whip—he left his mark on my brother's back, so that my brother will bear the signa-

ture of Hamad the executioner to his grave. Whither Hamad the executioner will precede him," he added grimly.

Something was picking at the back of Lundy's mind—something Ali had said, or the way he had said it—

"There is one who walks beside the road, effendi," whispered Ali suddenly.

"Stay here. Keep the lights dimmed as they are now," ordered Lundy as he slid to the ground.

He walked softly round the rear of the jeep, keeping out of the light himself. Yes, someone was coming, moving silently on the soft sand shoulder; coming from the direction of Carstairs' house. Hand on his gun, Lundy waited—

"Mr. Lundy! Are you there, Mr. Lundy?"

Laila Carstairs' voice—

"I'm here," he answered.

"The praise to Allah," she exclaimed in Arabic, and came out on the road, half-running. As the dimmed lights caught her, Lundy saw that she was wearing a tan skirt and blouse, with low-heeled walking shoes. He drew her clear of the light, not knowing who might be following her.

"Anything wrong, Mrs. Carstairs?"

"I think," she said quite calmly, "that my husband means to kill you."

"You'd better tell me about it," he suggested.

"Who's that in the jeep?" she asked.

"Ali. Cassidy sent him along to drive me to your house. But—"

"Mason's in a state of panic," she said, low-voiced. "Some one phoned him at Killingsley's. He came back into the living-room white-faced, made an excuse about urgent business and dragged me home. The instant we got there he ran to your room, took one look and went into his study. I could hear him shouting into the telephone—I think he was talking to Cassidy at Camp Three from the few words I caught. I heard your name—then I heard him say 'You sent Ali with him? Have you lost your mind?'—his voice kept rising and finally I heard him yell: 'All right, then I'll stop him myself!' He slammed up the phone and dialed another number. This time I couldn't hear what he was saying. I went into my room, put on a negligee and sat down at my dressing table. I knew he'd look in on me, so when he did he found me putting cold cream on my face. 'Go to bed and stay there,' was all he said. He had his shoulder holster on under his coat: I saw the bulge. I changed into these things and slipped outside. Mason was in the living room, pacing up and down—waiting

for someone. So I thought I'd better start down the road toward Cassidy's house and see if I could find you along the way and warn you."

The guilty conscience, thought Lundy. Reacting to pressure as always. But whose conscience? Carstairs', or Laila's? Or both?

To Laila he said:

"That was good of you, Mrs. Carstairs. But why should you be so concerned for my safety?"

"Because," she told him, "you appear to be threatening the success of my husband's plans. I have the most compelling personal reason for desiring to see those plans blocked."

"You helped Johnny Fleming for the same reason, didn't you?" Lundy demanded.

"I—I may have helped bring him to his grave."

She choked up. If she was acting, it was superbly done.

He walked over to the jeep.

"Ali," he said to the driver, "a little while ago you seemed to think that your revenge and mine were associated. In that case you had better tell me where to find the body of my younger brother while I am still alive to make use of the information."

He heard Ali suck in his breath sharply: it was too dark to see his expression, but the aura of his fear was a tangible thing.

"The effendi is a worker of magic," he muttered.

"Nay. The effendi has a brain and uses it," retorted Lundy. "Your brother was flogged this afternoon, for a trifling cause—perhaps an arranged cause. Why? Someone tried to take me in the same sort of trap tonight. Why? In my case, I know why: because I came here to find out how my friend died—my friend whom my heart calls my younger brother. Therefore I endangered those who had brought him to his death. It runs in my mind that your brother was also a danger to those same murderers. He could be a danger to them only because of something he knows. He drives a truck for the company. Perhaps there was a night not long ago when that truck took the body of my younger brother to a secret grave. Perhaps thereafter your brother talked of this matter—and so he was flogged to remind him to keep his tongue between his teeth."

"It is not known that he talked to *me*," muttered Ali.

There was a desperate question in his voice.

"Not known, or you would be—elsewhere, Ali," said Laila at Lundy's elbow. "But it begins to be suspected."

"Then for me there is no hope save in the effendi's protection," said Ali. "The tomb of the marabout on the hill which looks down on Camp Three holds the secret the effendi seeks."

"Take me there. Now," ordered Lundy.

"I go with you," Laila asserted.

"As you will," Lundy didn't dare take her home, and he couldn't leave her standing on the roadside. Besides, there was no time to argue. Time, as he had said, was a-wasting.

Laila, leaning forward from the back seat as Ali swung the jeep around and headed back the way they had come, whispered in Lundy's ear:

"If we find what you expect —what then?"

He knew what she was thinking. Suppose you get your proof —will you, or any of us, live to make use of it? Her hand touched his shoulder. He placed his fingers over hers.

"I'm not a reckless man, Mrs. Carstairs," he told her. "I took out a little life insurance, so to speak, before I set foot on Sheikh Ibrahim's territory."

They had passed Cassidy's darkened bungalow before she spoke again:

"I think you will find what you are looking for, Mr. Lundy. This marabout's tomb is an ancient ruin, long neglected. No Arab would dare to go there unless compelled: it is said there are djinni who inhabit the ruins, guarding the bones of the holy man. Therefore it is an ideal hiding place."

"Aye, billah," said Ali. "I too fear the djinni. But I fear the whips of Hamad more."

So he did understand English.

The jeep sped on: Ali was driving fast now, as though anxious to keep ahead of any pursuit. Looking back, Lundy saw no signs of other lights. He wondered what Carstairs was doing by this time. If he found his wife missing, he'd have fresh fears tormenting him—Ali was checking the jeep's speed.

To the right of the road, a hill bulked dark against the stars.

"We must climb here, effendi," said Ali. "And without lights, otherwise we might be seen from Camp Three when we get higher."

He doused the lights, turned the jeep off the road and nosed it into a rough track that wound upward along the slope. How he could see to drive with only the pale star-shine to help him, Lundy couldn't understand: but the jeep kept going, grinding along in second gear, lurching and swaying as it clawed for traction with all four wheels like a cat scrambling up the side of a cliff.

The truck that Ali's brother had been driving must've been a four-wheel-drive job, too, Lundy reflected.

Up, up—

"Camp Three," muttered Ali.

They were on the crest. Far out across the desert, Lundy

could see a cluster of lights and dim upreaching fingers of shadow that he knew must be oil-derricks. He thought they were at least three miles away.

"We must walk now," said Ali, switching off the engine. "Sound carries far in the night."

They got out of the jeep.

"Wait," cautioned Lundy. "I think I hear a car down on the road."

They stood very still. No sound from below. No gleam of headlights.

"Nerves, I reckon," said Lundy. "Let's go. I suppose there's a flashlight in the jeep somewhere?"

"I have one in my bag," Laila spoke up.

It occurred to Lundy as they moved off through the darkness that this would be a fine place to leave his body, too. Just in case Laila and Ali had a little private understanding. He wished he'd looked at that .45 to make sure it was loaded.

Another bank of shadow ahead.

"The tomb of the marabout," whispered Ali. "There is an opening somewhere on this side."

Lundy's outstretched hand touched rough stone. He couldn't see anything—

"To your right, effendi," came Ali's whisper.

The driver seemed to think he could be heard from Camp Three if he spoke any louder: or maybe it was the djinni that worried him. Lundy groped around a corner of rock. It was even darker here—anyway he couldn't see the lights of Camp Three now.

"Try the flash," he said to Laila.

The beam showed a narrow passage between huge blocks of stone. Ahead, the light dissolved in utter blackness.

"Come on," bade Lundy.

Laila kept the light on the ground—Lundy picked his way over rubble and larger fragments of stone, stumbling now and then as the footing proved treacherous. A sick-sweetish smell was in his nostrils: a smell of death. The stone walls receded a little. This seemed to be the interior of the tomb, where the faithful had doubtless gathered centuries ago to pray.

Laila swung the light-beam in a semi-circle.

"Ah," said Lundy.

They hadn't even troubled to shovel sand over it, they'd been so sure no one would come to this place. It was a six-foot box of raw pine boards. It hadn't been here long: the light gleamed on fresh-driven nail-heads.

"I have brought the pick-mattock, effendi," Ali whispered.

A pick-mattock and shovel were standard equipment on oil-

field jeeps. Lundy took the tool, jammed the point under one of the top boards and pried. The nails squeaked as the board came up. Lundy got his fingers under the end of the board, pulled it off, tackled the next one. The smell of death was stronger; his stomach churned. The second board was off. One more—he wouldn't focus his eyes on the inside of the box till he had the last board clear. It was stubborn—Lundy wanted to smash at it with the pick, tear it to splinters. He forced himself to work carefully at the nails. At last—

"I can't look," breathed Laila.

"Hold the light steady, please," Lundy heard himself say.

The box was full of straw.

Lundy began scooping out the straw in double-handsful. His fingers touched something cold. He shoved all the loose straw to one end of the box with a single sweep of his two hands—

The body under the straw was naked. It lay face downward, but the shape of the head, the slightly protruding ears, the sandy hair told Lundy that he was looking at the body of Johnny Fleming.

The back told him something else.

From shoulders to buttocks, that dead back was criss-crossed by a pattern of dark welts, ridged here and there with dried blood.

Lundy dropped to his knees, his hands reaching out to rest on the mangled back.

"Johnny," he choked. "Johnny —what have they done to you—"

From the darkness of the tomb, the voice of Ali answered:

"It is the signature of Hamad the executioner, effendi. Your younger brother died under the whip."

Ali was holding the flashlight now; Laila was back in the shadows, retching and sobbing.

Striving for self-command amid the surge of red fury that possessed his soul, Lundy managed to turn the head a little, so that he could look at Johnny's dead face. It was so contorted with agony as to be almost unrecognizable. But it was Johnny's face, no doubt about that.

"Effendi," urged Ali, "I think you had better turn the whole body over. You have not seen all: such a whipping would not have killed him—unless— Here, I will help you, and may Allah grant me his compassion if I do violence to the dead."

Together they managed to turn the body on its side. The flesh was loose and rubbery; decomposition had begun, but was not far advanced in that dry desert air.

"You see, effendi," Ali muttered.

Lundy saw—saw the great

gashes across the abdomen, from which white loops of intestines protruded.

"This was done by the knife-armed lash I told you of," Ali said. "The order was given to Hamad, see that this man is not alive when the whipping is over. Therefore with the final strokes, he used the whip with the hooked knife at its tip."

Lundy rose to his feet. He found that his brain had cleared itself of the red rage-mist. He knew exactly what he was going to do next.

He peeled off his coat, wrapped it around Johnny Fleming's dead torso, bent down and picked the body up in his arms. It was not hard to handle; rigor mortis had come and gone long ago.

"Lead the way with the light, Ali. Help Mrs. Carstairs—"

"I'm—all right," said Laila. "What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you when we're in the jeep," Lundy answered. "No time now—go ahead, Ali."

He staggered after Ali along the stone passageway, bearing the body of his friend. The fresh air outside helped him a little. He plowed ahead through the sand, conscious that Laila was at his side with a supporting hand—a surprisingly strong hand—under his armpit.

"This way—here is the jeep," Ali called softly, just ahead.

"Then douse that light before—"

The crack of a pistol-shot cut off Lundy's order. He saw the flashlight fall from Ali's hand, saw the shadow that was Ali's body crumple just as the light went out.

"Down," he snapped to Laila. "We're on the sky-line—"

He dropped Johnny's body, grabbed at Laila to pull her down—the unseen pistol barked again, he heard the whisper of the bullet in the night. His own gun was in his hand—he half-crouched, poised, listening for a betraying sound—he thought he heard a pebble roll—there was a shadow there beyond the jeep, a shadow that moved—he fired at it—the .45 was loaded, all right. Instantly came the crack of the return shot—something hit Lundy a sharp blow on the right shoulder.

His pistol slipped from nerve-shocked fingers; he rolled over sidewise, clawing for the gun with his left hand.

In the darkness, somebody laughed and fled, scuttling down the stony track, heedless now of making noise.

Laila choked out a curse in Arabic—a curse to which she attached the name of Mason Carstairs.

"Give me the pistol—I'll drown that laugh in blood—" she gasped.

"You'll never hit him now,"

said Lundy. "We'd better see to Ali."

He was crawling as he spoke toward the spot where Ali had fallen. He wasn't sure he could stand up if he tried, not sure either that it was safe—he might still be silhouetted against the skyline.

Down on the road, he heard the whine of a starter, then the receding purr of a fleeing car, going back toward the town.

"He's gone," Lundy said. "Can you find that flash—Thanks."

One look at Ali was enough to tell Lundy that the driver would never sit and watch Hamad the executioner dying on the sand. Ali was dead himself, with a neat little round bullet hole in his right temple.

"May Allah the Compassionate receive his soul," whispered Laila. "But you—I heard the bullet hit you—let me see—"

"Right shoulder," muttered Lundy.

She ripped away the sleeve of his shirt, made a pad of her handkerchief, tied it in place with strips torn from the sleeve.

"It's not bleeding much," she reported, her voice steady again.

"Small high-power bullet," said Lundy. "Mauser or Luger, maybe?"

"My husband," Laila told him, "carries a Mauser pistol in his shoulder holster—a little one."

"He does, does he?" gritted Lundy. "All right—help me up—I think I can stand—dammit, I've *got* to stand."

He staggered to his feet.

"Now give me a hand to get Johnny's body into the jeep," he ordered.

"But why—"

"Help me—don't argue," he begged. "I can't lift him alone with only one good arm."

He bent over Johnny's body, trying to get his left hand underneath—Laila lifted the torso to a sitting position, so that Lundy could slip his left arm around the lacerated back.

"Now if I take his legs, I think we can manage," she said.

Between them they lifted the body a foot or so off the ground and stumbled to the jeep with it. Somehow, pushing and heaving, they got it into the right hand front seat and fastened it there with a piece of tow rope.

Unasked, Laila climbed into the driver's seat beside dead Johnny: Lundy scrambled into the rear.

"Camp Three," he directed. "Better use your lights. No matter if they see us now."

She started the jeep down the rough track, driving expertly.

Half-way down she said over her shoulder:

"The road to Camp Three is guarded, and I don't have a pass."

"Never mind—keep going,"

groaned Lundy. The pain had come to his shoulder now.

He fought off the pain-waves —whoever had shot at him might come back and try another shot—he fought that idea off too. He was going to Camp Three. Regardless.

Here was the road. Laila twisted the jeep's wheel to the right, stepped on the gas pedal. Lundy sat up straighter.

He had to be ready—ready for anything. Johnny Fleming's head bounced from side to side as though warning Lundy of danger.

Side to side — back and forth—

No, that was somebody swinging a lantern across the road—a red lantern.

Brakes squealed as Laila brought the jeep to a stop. The man who held the red lantern had a carbine slung from one shoulder and a bandolier of cartridges across the other.

"Message for Cassidy effendi," called Lundy in Arabic.

"No one passes tonight," the guard answered.

"I can get past him before he can unsling that rifle," Laila murmured.

"Wait," Lundy bade her. "There are lights on the road—coming this way. Maybe it's Cassidy."

The approaching car slid to a dust-raising stop just beyond the guard.

"What's wrong here? What was all that shooting up on the hill?" boomed Cassidy's voice.

Lundy rolled rather than climbed over the side of the jeep and walked out where the lights would fall on him.

"I've brought something to show you, Cassidy," he announced.

"My God, man, what's happened to you?" Cassidy demanded, striding past the staring guard.

"It's what happened to somebody else I want you to see," Lundy answered. "Let me have the flashlight, Mrs. Carstairs. Look, Cassidy. Look at your work."

The pitiless ray of the flashlight illumined the naked, whip-torn body—

"Johnny Fleming!" whispered Cassidy.

"He was whipped to death, Cassidy," Lundy snarled.

"The bastards—the dirty murderin' bastards—" choked Cassidy.

"Your pals, Cassidy," accused Lundy.

"No pals of mine from this minute on," said Cassidy in a voice like the clash of steel gears. "I had no hand in this work, Lundy, and I'll have no truck with any man who did. Except to help bring him to the gallows."

"That," said Lundy, "is how I figured you'd feel about it.

How long to sun-up now, Cassidy?"

"About two hours," Cassidy told him. "But—"

"Then it is already tomorrow," Lundy interrupted. "But we have time for a little talk, Cassidy, you and I." . . . . .

. . . . . At the edge of the terrace in front of his palace gate, facing the stone-paved square, Sheikh Ibrahim of Al-Qatana sat on the rug-covered seat of judgment. One claw-like hand stroked his wispy white beard; small bloodshot eyes set close on either side of a great beak of a nose surveyed Frank Lundy with smoldering malice. Three or four councilors—two of them priests in white robes—stood behind the Sheikh, whose own robe was of heavy shimmering brocade, richly embroidered in gold. A single ruby of enormous size glittered in the folds of his turban.

Lundy, standing directly before and below the Sheikh at the foot of the steps leading up to the terrace, didn't like the way the Sheikh was looking at him. He didn't like the other arrangements, either. The two sword-bearing zkirts who stood close to him on either side stank like wet dogs, and they'd been unnecessarily rough as they hustled him across the square. But even less to Lundy's taste was the sight of Hamad the executioner, standing like a statue in sable ivory with folded arms awaiting the Sheihk's commands. A naked sword, curved and broad in the blade, and three neatly coiled black whips, lay on a square of carpet at Hamad's feet—also waiting.

A few feet from the motionless Hamad, Prince Abd-el-Kader—wearing his wazeer's robe of ceremony over whipcord riding clothes and spurred boots—was whispering with Mason Carstairs. Altogether, things didn't look too good to Lundy. Of course, he didn't look too good himself—what with Cassidy's shirt hanging on him in folds, his right arm in a sling, his pants torn in three or four places and no hat, his appearance was little short of villainous.

Well, he'd planned for this, hadn't he? He'd figured they'd have to take him to the Sheikh, and here he was.

Careful now, Lundy. Pick the right words.

He cleared his throat—

The Sheikh's lips twisted in a snarl that displayed a mouthful of decayed teeth.

"Have done with whispers," he said in a high whinnying voice. "Who accuses this man?"

"I accuse him," said Mason Carstairs.

A sigh of excitement rippled through the crowd that was held back by the palace zkirts and a

few of the Sheikh's khaki-clad policemen. What? One Nasrani accusing another before the Sheikh? Here was a tale, brothers—a tale to be told and relished in every coffee-house from Damascus to Dhahran.

"Stand forth and be heard," the Sheikh commanded.

Slowly Carstairs walked to the foot of the stone steps. He was freshly dressed in sparkling whites, his ruddy face fresh-shaven, his expression grave—as that of one who performs an unpleasant but imperative duty. To the casual eye he was wholly calm and self-possessed: but Lundy didn't miss the slight bulge under his left arm. Carstairs wasn't altogether at ease if he was carrying a gun here in the Sheikh's presence.

Yet his voice was steady enough—

"I accuse Frank Lundy, who stands there," he said in poorly accented but quite understandable Arabic, "of the murder of one of Your Highness' subjects, a faithful servant of my company, Ali ibn Selim, whose body I have caused to be brought here in evidence."

He gestured toward a blanket-covered object which lay on the pavement near the steps.

"He lies in his teeth!" cried Lundy sharply.

The accusation had taken him completely by surprise. He had expected to be brought before the Sheikh—that was why he had allowed himself to be found sitting in the jeep at the roadside by one of Abd-el-Kader's patrols. But he had certainly not expected to be charged with murder.

Had he gambled his life on a bad guess? There was no mercy in the Sheikh's eyes or voices:

"Be still, you Nasrani dog," he whinnied. "If he speaks again before he is bidden, let the guards strike him on the mouth with the flat of their swords. As for you who accuse this man, where is your proof?"

A gray-beard at the Sheikh's elbow—his white head-dress, wound without the aid of the ighal or binding cord, suggested that he might be a priest—leaned forward and whispered in the Sheikh's ear.

"No matter for that," the Sheikh said impatiently. "The evidence of an infidel ought not, as you say, to be received against a true believer: but these are both infidels, accuser and accused. Let the accuser speak on."

"The man Lundy is employed by my company," Carstairs said. "He came here yesterday. I was warned that he came to spy on me—" the Sheikh's beard twitched—"but it was my duty to offer him the hospitality of my house. Last night, I returned home to find him absent; also a jeep belonging to the company was

missing, as was the driver Ali ibn Selim. I drove along the road toward Camp Three, and came upon the jeep standing at the roadside. Nearby I found the body of Ali ibn Selim, dead of a bullet-wound in the head—as Your Highness may see."

He stooped and lifted the blanket; it was Ali's body, of course.

"Then the man Lundy came from the shadows," Carstairs went on. "I saw a weapon in his hand, and fired at him. I think my bullet struck him in the shoulder. He cried out and fled. Fearing to pursue him in the night, I returned to my house and telephoned to His Excellency the Wazeer, Prince Abd-el-Kader. His Excellency will tell the rest."

Abd-el-Kader, bowed low to his father, murmuring respectful salutations.

"At sunrise my askaris found the man Lundy in the jeep which he had taken from the house of Carstairs effendi," he reported. "He had been wounded in the shoulder by a bullet. Also there was found in his pocket this pistol, which shows evidence of having been recently fired. Naturally he denied having killed Ali ibn Selim: but I have no doubt he is guilty."

He took the pistol which one of the zkirts handed him and held it out on his upturned plams. The Sheikh peered at it, blinked, and looked again at Lundy.

"I have no doubt of his guilt either, my son," he whinnied. "Yet before pronouncing judgment, it is fitting that I hear what he may have to say in his defense."

Lundy tried to keep his voice steady—all this was horribly cut and dried—doubtless Abd-el-Kader had already prejudiced the Sheikh's mind. But it was too late for regrets—

"I have several things to say, Your Highness," he spoke up. "To begin with, it was not I but my accuser, Carstairs, who killed Ali ibn Selim—as Your Highness may readily ascertain if you will examine the size of the bullet wound in Ali's head. It will prove to be a small one, such as the wound in my own shoulder. It was made by a small-caliber bullet, such as will be found in the pistol which Carstairs is now carrying under his coat. It is considerably smaller than the wound which would be made by a bullet fired from the pistol which was found on me, and which has just been shown you as being the murder weapon. That pistol is of .45 caliber. It is hardly necessary to say more. Your Highness is naturally familiar with firearms, as befits a warrior whose exploits are known far beyond the confines of your own dominions."

"That is an old trick of

guilty men," the Sheikh snarled. "Shifting the blame to the accuser—bah! Now—"

The priest in the white headdress was whispering in his ear again. Abd-el-Kader wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. For some reason, that whispering made him nervous. He flung a glance over his shoulder toward the end of the street which debouched into the square opposite the seat of judgment.

"So be it," the Sheikh said impatiently. "Look, then, and satisfy yourself that the dog is lying to save his neck."

The white-turbaned man came down the steps, walked in dignified silence to where Ali's body lay, bent over it. Every eye around the square was on him as he straightened, smoothed down his flowing robe, and turned to Abd-el-Kader.

"With your permission, excellent wazeer," he murmured, and held out his hand for the pistol.

"I see not what business this is of mullahs," Abd-el-Kader protested sullenly.

"Make an end, in Allah's name," whinnied the Sheikh.

Abd-el-Kader placed the pistol in the outstretched hand.

The priest looked at it, snapped out the magazine expertly enough, pushed the top cartridge into his palm.

Then he swung round to face the Sheikh.

"I am, as the noble wazeer says, a mullah—a humble servant of Allah," he said, still speaking gently. "But once I was a warrior, as Your Highness knows. I too have seen something of firearms. And I say—" his voice rose till it carried across the square—"I say that the wound in the head of Ali ibn Selim, may Allah receive his soul, could not have been made by a bullet fired from this pistol. It was made by a much smaller bullet."

There was an instant's silence—

"Then he must have another pistol, which he has hidden!" Carstairs burst out.

"Aye," agreed Abd-el-Kader. "A few strokes of Hamad's whip will soon get the truth from him."

"First let my good friend Carstairs show his own pistol to the reverend Imam," suggested Lundy, giving the priest the highest ecclesiastical title known to the Moslem faith.

"An old trick, as you yourself have said, my father," said Abd-el-Kader quickly. "Let the whip force confession from his lying throat. All here know that Carstairs effendi is an honest man."

"Aye, billah," whinnied the Sheikh. "Tie the dog up."

The zkirts gripped Lundy's arms—agony tore at his wounded shoulder, he fought for coherent speech amid the surge of pain—he must play his hidden

ace and gamble all on it, though he had not meant to play it so early—

"Before you do that, Highness," he cried, "let me ask you what you will say to the American consul who arrives on tonight's plane when he inquires for his friend Lundy?"

"He lies!" squalled Carstairs. "How would he know—"

The priest in the white turban looked quickly at Carstairs, then at Lundy—

"Walk carefully, there is treachery here, ya mowlai (my lord)," Lundy heard him say. "I do not think the wounded one is lying."

"It is easily proven whether I am or not," Lundy cried. "The plane has already left Dhahran, where the consul boarded it. It will lie over at Bahrein for two hours. Let a radio message be sent to the airline agent at Bahrein, to ask whether or not Vice-Consul Sedgwick is a passenger on board."

"The radio is out of order this morning," Carstairs muttered uneasily.

Abd-el-Kader glanced over his shoulder again. Far off, there was a rumbling of motors—

"Enough," the Sheikh pronounced, glaring now at Carstairs.

"We will let the consul examine this matter further. If he comes," he added, shifting his angry eyes to Lundy.

The rumbling of trucks was louder.

"Nay," cried Abd-el-Kader. "I am not satisfied. Is the blood of Ali ibn Selim to cry out in vain for vengeance on this infidel who has slain a true believer?"

The crowd began to mutter, pushing against the guards.

The Sheikh rose to his feet, eyes blazing.

"Do you speak against the word of your father, boy?" he snarled. "Who are you that you must be satisfied? I did not make you my wazeer that you might beard me before my people!"

On the far side of the square, motors were clamoring—a voice bawled: "Back—stand back—the Sheikh sits in judgment—" —other voices cried out in fear or anger—

Abd-el-Kader strode to the foot of the steps, his robe swirling about his booted legs. Hands on hips, he met his father's furious eyes without flinching.

"So be it, then!" he shouted. "Gray-beards and priests have ruled this land too long!"

Blue steel gleamed in the morning sunlight as he whipped a heavy Colt from under his robe, bounded up the steps and thrust his father back so that the old Sheikh sat down heavily on the rug-covered bench of justice.

"Traitor!" yelled the priest in the white turban. He leaped at Abd-el-Kader. The blue-steel

pistol smashed down on his head, he collapsed at the Sheikh's feet and rolled down the steps.

Foam of fury flecked the Sheikh's lips—he gobbled in his frantic effort to give tongue to the rage that consumed him—the other councilors stood paralyzed with horror—

"From this moment, I am Sheikh of Al-Qatana! I, Abd-el-Kader ben Ibrahim!" yelled the Prince. "And I stand here to do justice first of all on this infidel murderer! Let him have a hundred lashes—then strike off his head!"

Hamad the executioner unfolded his arms, bent and picked up a whip.

"Guards! Cut down this traitor!" The Sheikh had found coherence. Not one of the zkirts moved to obey. They were not even looking at the Sheikh—they were looking with bulging eyes at Mike Cassidy, striding across the square with a tommy-gun in the crook of his arm and fifty riflemen marching in column of threes at his heels.

Abd-el-Kader laughed aloud in exultation.

"Stand still, sword-bearers!" he mocked. "Stand still or die! My honored father, a new day has dawned—and of that day, I am master! These are my men, and the weapons they bear speak at my word. Is it not so, friend Cassidy?"

"No!" roared Cassidy in his rough oil-field Arabic, bringing the tommy-gun around so that its stubby muzzle pointed straight at the Prince's stomach. "No, it is not so. They speak at my word. And mine only. Drop that gun before I fill your belly full of lead, you murdering rat!"

The Prince gasped—the blood drained from his olive face, leaving it a sickly yellow.

"Cassidy!" screamed Carstairs. "You can't do this—you—" He was grabbing at Cassidy's arm—Cassidy knocked him sprawling with a backhand sweep, never taking his eyes from Abd-el-Kader.

"You men!" shrieked the Prince. "You are Arabs, and my subjects! Will you take the orders of a Nasrani against your true lord?"

In the khaki-shirted ranks behind Cassidy, somebody laughed.

"We are free Bedawi, owning no lord save Allah!" called a voice. "But Cassidy effendi is our mother and our father."

"Aye, billah!" cried several others.

"Drop the gun, Abd-el-Kader!" grated Cassidy. "I give you five seconds. One—two—"

Lundy, watching the Prince's face with cheerful interest, became conscious of a shadow that moved on the pavement. His head jerked around just in time for him to see Hamad the executioner, bending as though to lay his whip back in its place, snatch

up his sword and leap at Cassidy as a tiger leaps silent and deadly.

Lundy hurled himself forward, his left arm outflung: his fist smashed into the hard muscles that rippled over Hamad's ribs—the sword flashed down, but its blade rang on the stones as Hamad went to his knee, off-balanced by Lundy's thrust. Then the tommy-gun spoke. Hamad the executioner clutched his bullet-torn stomach with both hands and collapsed in a shuddering heap of ebon flesh.

"Thanks, Lundy," said Cassidy from the corner of his mouth—his attention snapped back to Abd-el-Kader before that young man could snatch at opportunity.

"Oh, you're welcome," muttered Lundy, watching the dying Hamad. "Too bad Ali can't see this."

Something hard jabbed his back.

"It'll be too bad for you, Lundy, if you don't stand perfectly still," said Mason Carstairs' voice in Lundy's ear. "Cassidy! Listen to me!"

Cassidy's head jerked round.

"What the hell—" he began.

"I've got a gun in Lundy's back, and I'll blast his spine in two if you make a move I don't like," Carstairs interrupted. "I want a car, and safe conduct down to the oil dock. There's a tanker in port. Her captain's bound to take me aboard. I'll run my chances of what you and Lundy can prove afterward. So—"

The crack of a gun cut him short.

The pressure on Lundy's spine relaxed. He jumped aside, whirling.

Carstairs was sinking to the pavement, a little Mauser pistol slipping from his fingers. Lundy grabbed it with his good left hand, alerted by a half-glimpsed flurry of movement on the terrace—safety locks clicked in the ranks behind Cassidy—

"Hold your fire!" barked Cassidy.

Prince Abd-el-Kader was in the act of laying the blue-steel Colt on the Sheikh's knees.

"Having done justice on the scoundrel who led me into the ways of sin," he cried, high and clear, "I throw myself on the mercy of the Sheikh, my father."

He flung himself at the Sheikh's feet and kissed the hem of the brocaded robe.

"Well, how do you like that?" growled Cassidy.

"I don't like it a damn' bit," Lundy retorted. He glared down at the still form of Mason Carstairs and the dark stain that spread on the breast of that crisp white jacket. "Too easy an end for this bastard—and the other one sucking up to Papa. By God, he won't get away with it."

The crowd of townspeople

were hooting with derision at the sight of Prince Abd-el-Kader groveling like a whipped dog before his father. Some of them started pushing past the nerveless guards—

"Stop that nonsense—clear the square, Sergeant Hosein," Cassidy directed.

The sergeant grinned and snapped orders—his men deployed smartly, began herding the crowd back with the cheerful brutality normal to bedouin soldiers dealing with despised town-dwellers.

Lundy walked over to the foot of the steps, where a couple of the Sheikh's councilors were tending the priest whom Abd-el-Kader had pistol-whipped.

The Sheikh had not moved at all since Cassidy's men had first appeared.

He sat now staring with those little bloodshot eyes at his abject son.

"May I have a word with you, ya mowlai?" Lundy asked.

The Sheikh lifted his eyes; he blinked at Lundy as though he had never seen him before.

"Speak," he permitted.

"I am returning to Basra tonight," Lundy said. "I should like to be able to inform my superiors of the Mid-East Petroleum Corporation that Your Highness is prepared to negotiate a renewal of their concession to extract oil within your domain."

"The concession," whinnied the Shiekh, "expired six months ago."

"But then—" began Lundy, and stopped as he saw the Sheikh's lips move again.

"Your company," the Sheikh explained, "continues here under a clause of the concession which provides that operations may go on while renewal is under negotiation. My son—" the word seemed to gag him—"has been urging that I make a new arrangement with another company. Certain others—" he glanced at the priest in the white headdress, who was sitting up with his head in both hands—"have begged me to get rid of you unbelieving dogs altogether, saying that thus only might I earn the mercy of Allah. Fool that I was, I hesitated. But now—"

He paused, as though waiting.

Abd-el-Kader slobbered — "My father—O my father!"

"But now," suggested Lundy, "it may seem to you that certain recent events must be taken into consideration. There is, for example, the murder of an American employee of my company, John Fleming, who was whipped to death by your executioner Hamad—"

The Sheikh jerked bolt upright.

"As Allah sees me," he cried, "I knew nothing of such a matter. I gave no such judgment.

Was this your doing, Abd-el-Kader?"

The Prince did not lift his head.

Into the folds of his father's robe he muttered:

"Aye. I was your wazeer, and you were ill. You had decreed that if one of your people were hurt by a motor car, the driver should have fifty lashes. The Nasrani Fleming so offended. I enforced your decree."

"He lies," said Lundy. "He and the man Carstairs contrived a trap for Fleming. Thereafter your son caused Hamad to use his whip in such a fashion that Fleming's belly was torn open, and he died."

"You have proof of this?" the Sheikh snarled.

"The body of Fleming shall be shown you. For the rest, ask your son if the whipping was done in public, in the square, as is customary?"

"Speak," ordered the Sheikh.

"Nay, that would have made talk—it was done in the inner courtyard," whined Abd-el-Kader. "I thought you would wish—"

"He thought," interrupted Lundy, "that my friend Fleming had found out too much about his dirty scheming with Carstairs. So did Carstairs. They did not dare have Fleming shot or stabbed. That would have been brought home to them in the end. Therefore they had him whipped to death—a matter, O Sheikh, which could be blamed on you when the questions came to be asked."

"Ah," said the Sheikh.

"They kept his body hidden in the tomb of the marabout, where I found it last night. They meant to produce it if they had to," Lundy went on mercilessly. "As evidence against you."

"Ah," said the Sheikh again, and kicked his kneeling son in the face. Abd-el-Kader whimpered as he wiped blood from his streaming nose.

"Then," Lundy went on, "there is also the matter of the killing of Carstairs by your son, which—while a matter of essential justice in the eyes of Allah—might be differently viewed by mere mortals unpossessed of the facts. It runs in my mind, ya mowlai, that it could be sound policy for you to make your peace with the Mid-East Petroleum Corporation."

"Indeed," spoke up the white-turbaned priest. "Infidels or no infidels, there could be a great trouble come of all this killing."

"As the reverend Imam says," agreed Lundy.

The Sheikh's withered hands clenched in his lap.

"What would be required of me?" he asked between his teeth.

"Renewal of the concession—and punishment for the mur-

derer of Fleming and Carstairs," Lundy told him.

"The concession," said the Sheikh slowly, "will be renewed. But there can be no punishment for the killing of these two infidels of whom you speak."

"My father!" choked Abd-el-Kader, on a note of hope. He lifted his head.

"In that case—" Lundy began.

"Wait," bade the Sheikh, raising a cautioning hand. "I do not yield to threats. Do not utter them in my presence, but hear me out. There can be no punishment for the killing, because in Allah's mercy it is decreed that man dies only once. A villainous son who has been hanged as a traitor cannot thereafter suffer the same penalty for murder. Are you satisfied, Nasrani?"

Abd-el-Kader shrieked and clutched his father's knees.

Lundy's eyes never left the Sheikh's face.

"I shall, as I said, be leaving for Basra tonight," he observed.

"It will be at noon-day, here in the square where all may see," the Sheikh answered the unspoken question.

Abd-el-Kader shrieked again, his clawing nails rasped over the gold embroidery—

"Then," said Lundy, "I shall be satisfied, ya mowlai. Have I leave to depart your presence—until the noon hour?"

"Allah speed thee," muttered the Sheikh. . . . .

. . . . . Lundy tore the last sheet from the big yellow pad, added it to the others which were already filled with his neat handwriting, and stuffed the whole business into his brief case. Good thing he could write with his left hand. He reached up, snapped off the seat-light, and sat staring into the star-studded darkness beyond the plane's wing-tip.

He didn't need to read over what he'd written. It was all there—all, anyway, that the moguls of Mid-East Petroleum needed to know about what had happened in Al-Qatana.

His mind clicked off the items of his report, one by one.

Carstairs had cooked up a deal to switch the Al-Qatana concession to International Oil—price, a cool quarter million, cash on delivery. Meanwhile he'd been kidding Eccles along with hopeful reports about the Sheikh "coming around" — when in fact, the Sheikh had made up his mind he wanted no part of Mid-East or International either: what he wanted was Yanks go home. So Carstairs had turned to Abd-el-Kader, and they'd planned to depose the Sheikh in his son's favor, whereupon Abd-el-Kader would sign up with International and Carstairs would be paid off.

So far, the report was coldly factual, and was supported up to the hilt by the papers Lundy

had taken from Carstairs' strongbox—the key of which he'd found hanging from Carstairs' dead neck.

From that point on, however, the report omitted a few facts and edited others. For instance, it didn't mention that Cassidy had been brought into the deal as trainer and commander of the revolutionary "army," for which Carstairs had used Mid-East money to buy weapons. According to the report, Cassidy had appeared at the crucial moment with a few of the company's "watchmen," and had taken action only after Abd-el-Kader had treacherously murdered his accomplice, Carstairs. Fearing that he would then, as he threatened, cause harm to Lundy and to his father, Cassidy had felt justified in preventing him from doing so. Afterward, the Sheikh had condemned his son to death and he had been duly hanged.

The Sheikh had also, the report concluded, partly in recompense for Carstairs' murder and partly in gratitude to Cassidy, decided to renew Mid-East's concession — memorandum of agreement attached, bearing the Sheikh's seal and duly witnessed by Vice-Consul Sedgwick. All Eccles had to do now was to hammer out the details.

A nice well-wrapped little package, thought Lundy bitterly.

His conscience didn't bother him about taking Cassidy off the hook; Cassidy had that much coming. Cassidy'd get a nice bonus, and probably a pay-boost too. So, for that matter, would Lundy. But the bonus wouldn't bring Johnny Fleming back—

The report made no mention at all of Johnny Fleming.

That was the point on which Lundy's conscience kept nagging at him. He'd seen justice done on Johnny's murderers. Hamad the executioner was dead. Carstairs was dead. Abd-el-Kader had died horribly, strangling in the noose after the zkirts had hauled him up to the cross-bar. But how about doing justice to Johnny's memory? After all, if it hadn't been for Johnny's letter, Lundy would never have gone to Al-Qatana and started stirring up guilty consciences to the destruction of their owners —and Mid-East would have lost out on a billion-dollar oil concession.

And for that letter, written as a matter of duty to his employers, Johnny had paid with his life.

On that basis, Mid-East ought to do something pretty handsome for Johnny's folks. They could use the money, as Lundy well knew. They were far from rich.

Then why, Lundy asked himself, hadn't he put all this into his report? The answer was, he couldn't quite believe it. There

was something wrong with the picture.

It wasn't that the manner of Johnny's death had to be kept from his people, to spare them unutterable horror. That Lundy could take care of. Johnny's body had been decently buried in a grave in the Mid-East compound at Al-Qatana. Of the American employees, only Lundy and Cassidy knew how Johnny had died; the others were as much in the dark as ever—they'd talk among themselves, of course, but they'd forget the whole thing in a week or two. As for Laila Carstairs, she was aboard this plane en route to Baghdad, where she had friends. She wouldn't talk, either, Lundy was sure. And he could certainly find a plausible excuse for not sending Johnny's body home.

But Lundy still didn't quite buy the story he'd built up.

What gagged him was that he couldn't see any motive that would have caused Carstairs and Abd-el-Kader to take the risk of having Johnny killed and maybe being tagged for it afterward. Sure, they could blame the Sheikh's edict. But why take the risk at all? Suppose Johnny *had* found out what they were up to? They were all set and ready to go. International was on the dotted line. Cassidy's trained men held the balance of power in Al-Qatana. Whatever Johnny might've reported to Lundy at this late date wouldn't have made any difference. The fact was, there was nothing Mid-East could've done to interfere. So why the risk?

The risk was considerable—to the very interests they were trying to protect. The International crowd might overreach a rival, but they were responsible business men—they'd never stand hitched if they found they were dealing with the murderers of an innocent American kid. The very papers that had proven to Lundy how fully Carstairs was committed to International had sown in his mind a seed of doubt about Johnny's murder. Carstairs would've known the chance he was taking: a far more perilous chance than letting Johnny write a dozen letters voicing his suspicions.

In Lundy's book, the thing just didn't add up.

That was why he couldn't make himself include Johnny's letter or Johnny's death in his report.

Subtle perfume touched Lundy's nostrils. He turned, knowing already that Laila Carstairs had slipped into the seat beside him.

"I didn't want to bother you while you were writing, Mr. Lundy," she said, "but I do want to thank you for helping me get a passport to leave Al-Qatana, I couldn't have stood

spending another night in that house."

"It was no trouble at all, Mrs. Carstairs," Lundy told her. "The fact is, if you'll forgive me for saying so, I think the Sheikh was glad to have you go. Anyway there are no thanks due to me from you—not after you stood by me so loyally last night."

He thought she shuddered—in the dim light he couldn't be quite sure.

"Loyally, did you say, Mr. Lundy?" she murmured. "And what of the loyalty I owed my husband?"

"I thought he was preparing to divorce you and make a present of you to Abd-el-Kader," Lundy retorted. "Do you owe loyalty to such a man?"

That, he remembered, was another item he'd left out of his report.

Quietly Laila Carstairs answered:

"I was brought up to believe that a husband has a right to rid himself of a childless wife. The Arab part of me still believes that, though the English part has acquired doubts—and a pride that recoils from being made a bargaining counter in a commercial transaction."

"You knew, then — Lundy began.

"I knew," she cut in, "that my husband and Prince Abd-el-Kader were scheming together, but for what purpose I had no idea. I knew also that Abd-el-Kader had an uncontrollable appetite to possess my person. I recoiled from his slightest touch—I loathed the man. But Abd-el-Kader could not take me to wife unless my husband divorced me, and I came to realize that Mason would do so only upon the fulfilment of conditions in the bargain between the two."

"He was holding you as his insurance policy, to protect himself against a double-cross by Abd-el-Kader," nodded Lundy. That figured.

Carstairs has been no one's fool—once Abd-el-Kader was in power, no telling what he might have done; maybe try to play Mid-East off against International, or cut in a new bidder. So Carstairs had hung on to Laila 'til he had his dough firmly in the bank.

"I still don't know exactly what they were up to," Laila said. "And I don't want to know. I think you have found out, anyway. I think you would find out anything you set your mind to, Mr. Lundy. But I have the impression that it was Johnny Fleming's letter which first put you on the trail?"

"That's right," Lundy said. "Johnny'd discovered something that made him suspicious. Unhappily, he tipped his hand somehow—and they killed him."

"That," said Laila, "isn't quite the way it was, Mr. Lundy."

"What!" gasped Lundy. "But he wrote—"

"He wrote, if I remember correctly," Laila interrupted again, "that something was screwey in Al-Qatana and he meant to find out more about it and write you again. He wasn't referring to the scheme that Mason and Abd-el-Kader were hatching. He knew no more of that than I did. What was screwey in Al-Qatana, from Johnny's viewpoint, was Mason's attitude toward myself and the apparent arrangement that in due course he would divorce me for Abd-el-Kader's benefit."

"You told Johnny about that?"

"Yes, I did," Laila answered. "In a moment of black despair. You see, Mr. Lundy, I loved Johnny. I think he loved me. When I told him what lay ahead for me, he begged me to go away with him. He knew one of the tanker captains, he said. He'd arrange everything. He wouldn't listen when I tried to say no. So in the end—God help me—I consented. It was for this reason that Johnny Fleming was done to death, Mr. Lundy."

"Your husband found out?" Lundy asked in a dull voice.

"Abd-el-Kader found out," Laila corrected. "That young man had spies in every household. Also he had an intuition provided by Shaitan his master, to whose keeping his black soul has now departed. When Johnny —disappeared, and the tale that he had been found dead of sunstroke was put about, I knew well enough what had happened. I could see it in Abd-el-Kader's eyes. I could hear it in his mocking laughter. I said nothing—what would have been the use? I kept my counsel. I watched and waited. Also I prayed. Then you came, and I knew my prayers had not gone unheard."

Her dark eyes glittered in the faint glow from the light across the aisle.

"My God, then you were sure your husband had—"

"It was Abd-el-Kader who did what was done, or caused it to be done," Laila said. "Out of sheer jealous fury. I think my husband would have stopped him if he'd dared. But Abd-el-Kader had a hold on him, and in the end he stood aside."

"Why didn't you tell me before?" Lundy demanded.

"I had no proof," she answered. "And you are one who deals with facts and evidence. So I helped you as best I could—the voice of Allah whispered in my heart that you would bring the murderers to justice in your own way. As indeed you did."

"I wonder," Lundy muttered, "why Johnny wrote me that letter—if, as you say, he was planning to run off with you."

"He didn't tell me about the letter," Laila admitted. "But I do know how highly he thought of you—how much he valued your good opinion. I think he was afraid, when you heard he'd run off, as you put it, with the wife of the Mid-East manager at Al-Qatana, you'd feel that he'd let you down. I think he was trying to build up a defense against your—disappointment in him. I'm sure you'd have had another letter—if—if— Ah, Mr. Lundy, try to understand. Johnny felt he was doing the right thing—he was protecting me, whom he loved, against men who would have traded me like a piece of merchandise. And—and he died for it, Mr. Lundy—"

"He was very young to die," Lundy whispered.

Johnny, he thought. Johnny. Why didn't you trust me? I'd have helped you, Johnny. I'd even have helped you get this woman if you had to have her.

Price the co-pilot came along the aisle.

"Basra in ten minutes, Frank," he announced as he passed.

Lundy nodded.

To Laila Carstairs he put a question:

"You wouldn't tell me all this yesterday," he said. "Then why do you tell me now?"

"Because," she said, in so low a voice that Lundy could hardly hear her, "I owe that much to my husband's memory. He is dead. He deserved to die. But I betrayed him, Mr. Lundy, to avenge my lover. That too is a great crime, for which I doubt I shall be forgiven. I could not bear that you should write in your report that Mason Carstairs helped to contrive the death of Johnny Fleming. He was weak—he did not stand up against Abd-el-Kader's raging jealousy. He has paid for his weakness. But he had no hand in the wicked thing that Abd-el-Kader did to Johnny."

Maybe he didn't, thought Lundy. But he sure as hell tried to contrive my death this morning, and he came too close to getting away with it. Well, his account's paid, as she says.

"I am not mentioning Johnny Fleming's death at all in my report, Mrs. Carstairs."

"Thank you," she whispered. "Good-bye, Mr. Lundy."

He watched her go down the aisle.

Women. He'd never understand 'em. Thank the Lord, he had too much sense to try.

But his hunch had been right—he couldn't in good conscience claim that Johnny had been loyally serving Mid-East's interests and been murdered in consequence.

He'd just send his own bonus along to Johnny's folks when he got it. It would help a little, anyway.

the star producers

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Mr. Quarterstone beamed like a cat stalking an unguarded dish of cream as he saw a vision of lovely money coming nearer and nearer...

MR. HOMER QUARTERSTONE was not, to be candid, a name to conjure with in the world of the Theatre. It must be admitted that his experience behind the footlights was not entirely confined to that immortal line: "Dinner is served." As a matter of fact, he had once said "The Baron is here" and "Will there be anything further, Madam?" in the same act; and in another never-to-be-forgotten drama which had run for eighteen performances on Broadway, he had taken part in the following classic dialogue:

NICK: Were you here?

JENKINS: (Mr. Homer Quarterstone): No, sir.

NICK: Did you hear anything?

JENKINS: No, sir.

NICK: A hell of a lot of use you are.

JENKINS: Yes, sir.

(Exit, carrying tray.)

In the executive line, Mr. Quarterstone's career had been marked by the same magnanimous emphasis on service

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The Saint thought the Supremax Academy and Mr. Homer Quarterstone positively fascinating, when he met them a number of years ago. Mr. Quarterstone was a man dedicated, as he was the first to admit, to the Service of the Arts. The paltry dollars he would take for a course of lessons—and another—and another, were obviously inadequate compensation for this great man's personal attention. Understandably, the Saint found this most interesting. . . .

From: THE HAPPY HIGHWAYMAN
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rather than personal glory. He had not actually produced any spectacles of resounding success but he had contributed his modest quota to their triumph by helping to carry chairs and tables on to the stage and arrange them according to the orders of the scenic director. And although he had not actually given his personal guidance to any of the financial maneuvers associated with theatrical production, he had sat in the box office at more than one one-night stand, graciously controlling the passage over the counter of those fundamental monetary items without which the labors of more egotistical financiers would have been fruitless.

Nevertheless, while it is true that the name of Quarterstone had never appeared in any headlines, and that his funeral cortege would never have attracted any distinguished pallbearers, he had undoubtedly found the Theatre more profitable than many other men to whom it had given fame.

He was a man of florid complexion and majestic bearing, with a ripe convexity under his waistcoat and a forehead that arched glisteningly back to the scruff of his neck; and he had a taste for black Homburgs and astrakhan - collared overcoats which gave an impression of great artistic prosperity. This prosperity was by no means illusory, for Mr. Homer Quarterstone, in his business capacity, was now the principal, president, director, owner and twenty-five percent of the staff of the Supremax Academy of Dramatic Art, which according to its frequent advertisements had been the training ground, the histrionic hothouse, so to speak, of many stars whose names were now household words from the igloos of Greenland to the tents of the wandering Bedouin. And the fact that Mr. Quarterstone had not become the principal, president, director, owner, etc., of the Supremax Academy until several years after the graduation of those illustrious personages, when in a period of unaccustomed affluence and unusually successful borrowing he had purchased the name and good will of an idealistic but moribund concern, neither deprived him of the legal right to make that claim in his advertising nor hampered the free flow of his imagination when he was expounding his own experience and abilities to prospective clients.

Simon Templar, who sooner or later made the acquaintance of practically everyone who was collecting too much money with too little reason, heard of him first from Rosalind Hale, who had been one of those clients; and she brought him her story

for the same reason that many other people who had been foolish would often come to Simon Templar with their troubles, as if the words "The Saint" had some literally supernatural significance, instead of being merely the nickname with which he had once incongruously been christened.

"I thought it was only the sensible thing to do—to get some proper training—and his advertisements looked genuine. You wouldn't think those film stars would let him use their names for a fraud, would you? . . . I suppose I was a fool, but I'd played in some amateur things, and people who weren't trying to flatter me said I was good, and I really believed I'd got it in me, sort of instinctively. And some of the people who believe they've got it in them must be right, and they must do something about it, or else there wouldn't be any actors and actresses at all, would there? . . . And really I'm—I—well, I don't make you shudder when you look at me, do I?"

This at least was beyond argument, unless the looker was a crusted misogynist, which the Saint very firmly was not. She had an almost childishly heart-shaped face, with small features that were just far enough from perfection to be exciting, and her figure had just enough curves in just the right places.

The Saint smiled at her without any cynicism.

"And when you came into this money . . ."

"Well, it looked just like the chance I'd been dreaming about. But I still wanted to be intelligent about it and not go dashing off to Hollywood to turn into a waitress, or spend my time sitting in producers' waiting rooms hoping they'd notice me and just looking dumb when they asked if I had experience, or anything like that. That's why I went to Quarterstone. And he said I'd got everything, and I only wanted a little schooling. I paid him five hundred dollars for a course of lessons, and then another five hundred for an advanced course, and then another five hundred for a movie course and by that time he'd been talking to me so that he'd found out all about that legacy, and that was when his friend came in and they got me to give them four thousand dollars to put that play on."

"In which you were to play the lead."

"Yes, and—"

"The play never did go on."

She nodded, and the moistness of her eyes made them shine like jewels. She might not have been outstandingly intelligent, she might or might not have had any dramatic talent, but her own drama was real. She was crushed, frightened, dazed,

wounded in the deep and desperate way that a child is hurt when it has innocently done something disastrous, as if she were still too stunned to realize what she had done.

Some men might have laughed, but the Saint didn't laugh. He said in his quiet friendly way: "I suppose you checked up on your legal position?"

"Yes. I went to see a lawyer. He said there wasn't anything I could do. They'd been too clever. I couldn't prove that I'd been swindled. There really was a play and it could have been put on, only the expenses ran away with all the money before that, and I hadn't got any more, and apparently that often happens, and you couldn't prove it was a fraud. I just hadn't read the contracts and things properly when I signed them, and Urlaub — that's Quarterstone's friend—was entitled to spend all that money, and even if he was careless and stupid you couldn't prove it was criminal. . . . I suppose it was my own fault and I've no right to cry about it, but it was everything I had, and I'd given up my job as well, and—well, things have been pretty tough. You know."

He nodded, straightening a cigarette with his strong brown fingers.

All at once the consciousness of what she was doing now seemed to sweep over her, leaving her tongue-tied. She had to make an effort to get out the last words that everything else had inevitably been leading up to.

"I know I'm crazy and I've no right, but could you—could you think of anything to do about it?"

He went on looking at her thoughtfully for a moment, and then, incredulously, she suddenly realized that he was smiling, and that his smile was still without satire.

"I could try," he said.

He stood up, long immaculately tailored legs gathering themselves with the lazy grace of a tiger, and all at once she found something in his blue eyes that made all the legends about him impossible to question. It was as if he had lifted all the weight off her shoulders without another word when he stood up.

"One of the first things I should prescribe is a man-sized lunch," he said. "A diet of doughnuts and coffee never produced any great ideas."

When he left her it was still without any more promises, and yet with a queer sense of certainty that was more comforting than any number of promises.

The Saint himself was not quite so certain; but he was interested, which perhaps meant more. He had that impetuously human outlook which judged an adventure on its artistic quality rather than on the quantity of

boodle which it might contribute to his unlawful income. He liked Rosalind Hale, and he disliked such men as Mr. Homer Quarterstone and Comrade Urlaub sounded as if they would be; more than that, perhaps, he disliked rackets that preyed on people to whom a loss of four thousand dollars was utter tragedy. He set out that same afternoon to interview Mr. Quarterstone.

The Supremax Academy occupied the top floor and one room on the street level of a sedate old-fashioned building in the West Forties; but the entrance was so cunningly arranged and the other intervening tenants so modestly unheralded that any impressionable visitor who presented himself first at the ground-floor room labelled "Inquiries," and who was thence whisked expertly into the elevator and upwards to the rooms above, might easily have been persuaded that the whole building was taken up with various departments of the Academy, a hive buzzing with ambitious Thespian bees. The brassy but once luscious blonde who presided in the Inquiry Office lent tone to this idea by saying that Mr. Quarterstone was busy, very busy, and that it was customary to make appointments with him days in advance; when she finally organized the interview it was with the regal generosity of a slightly flirtatious goddess performing a casual miracle for an especially favored and deserving suitor—a beautifully polished routine that was calculated to impress prospective clients from the start with a gratifying sense of their own importance.

Simon Templar was always glad of a chance to enjoy his own importance, but on this occasion he regretfully had to admit that so much flattery was undeserved, for instead of his own name he had cautiously given the less notorious name of Tombs. This funereal anonymity, however, cast no shadow over the warmth of Mr. Quarterstone's welcome.

"My dear Mr. Tombs! Come in. Sit down. Have a cigarette."

Mr. Quarterstone grasped him with large warm hands, wrapped him up, transported him tenderly and installed him in an armchair like a collector enshrining a priceless piece of fragile glass. He fluttered anxiously around him, pressing a cigarette into the Saint's mouth and lighting it before he retired reluctantly to his own chair on the other side of the desk.

"And now, my dear Mr. Tombs," said Mr. Quarterstone at last, clasping his hands across his stomach, "how can I help you?"

Simon looked at his hands, his feet, the carpet, the wall and then at Mr. Quarterstone.

"Well," he said bashfully, "I wanted to inquire about some dramatic lessons."

"Some—ah—oh, yes. You mean a little advanced coaching. A little polishing of technique?"

"Oh, no," said the Saint hastily. "I mean, you know your business, of course, but I'm only a beginner."

Mr. Quarterstone sat up a little straighter and gazed at him.

"You're only a beginner?" he repeated incredulously.

"Yes."

"You mean to tell me you haven't any stage experience?"

"No. Only a couple of amateur shows."

"You're not joking?"

"Of course not."

"Well!"

Mr. Quarterstone continued to stare at him as if he were something rare and strange. The Saint twisted his hatbrim uncomfortably. Mr. Quarterstone sat back again, shaking his head.

"That's the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," he declared.

"But why?" Simon asked, with not unreasonable surprise.

"My dear fellow, anyone would take you for a professional actor! I've been in the theatrical business all my life—I was on Broadway for ten years, played before the King of England, produced hundreds of shows—and I'd have bet anyone I could pick out a professional actor every time. The way you walked in, the way you sat down, the way you use your hands, even the way you're smoking that cigarette—it's amazing! Are you sure you're not having a little joke?"

"Absolutely."

"May I ask what is your present job?"

"Until a couple of days ago," said the Saint ingenuously, "I was working in a bank. But I'd always wanted to be an actor, so when my uncle died and left me twenty thousand dollars I thought it was a good time to start. I think I could play parts like William Holden," he added, looking sophisticated.

Mr. Quarterstone beamed like a cat full of cream.

"Why not?" he demanded oratorically. "Why ever not? With that natural gift of yours. . . ." He shook his head again, clicking his tongue in eloquent expression of his undiminished awe and admiration. "It's the most amazing thing! Of course, I sometimes see fellows who are nearly as good-looking as you are, but they haven't got your manner. Why, if you took a few lessons—"

Simon registered the exact amount of glowing satisfaction which he was supposed to register.

"That's what I came to you

for, Mr. Quarterstone. I've seen your advertisements—"

"Yes, yes!"

Mr. Quarterstone got up and came around the desk again. He took the Saint's face in his large warm hands and turned it this way and that, studying it from various angles with increasing astonishment. He made the Saint stand up and studied him from a distance, screwing up one eye and holding up a finger in front of the other to compare his proportions. He stalked up to him again, patted him here and there and felt his muscles. He stepped back again and posed in an attitude of rapture.

"Marvelous!" he said. "Astounding!"

Then, with an effort, he brought himself out of his trance.

"Mr. Tombs," he said firmly, "there's only one thing for me to do. I must take you in charge myself. I have a wonderful staff here, the finest staff you could find in any dramatic academy in the world, past masters, everyone of 'em—but they're not good enough. I wouldn't dare to offer you anything but the best that we have here. I offer you myself. And because I only look upon it as a privilege —nay, a sacred duty, to develop this God-given talent you have, I shall not try to make any money out of you. I shall only make a small charge to cover the actual value of my time. Charles Laughton paid me five thousand dollars for one hour's coaching in a difficult scene. Marlon Brando took me to Hollywood and paid me fifteen thousand dollars to criticize him in four rehearsals. But I shall only ask you for enough to cover my out-of-pocket expenses—let us say, one thousand dollars—for a course of ten special, personal, private, exclusive lessons . . . No," boomed Mr. Quarterstone, waving one hand in a magnificent gesture, "don't thank me! Were I to refuse to give you the benefit of all my experience, I should regard myself as a traitor to my calling, a very—ah—Ishmael!"

If there was one kind of acting in which Simon Templar had graduated from a more exacting academy than was dreamed of in Mr. Quarterstone's philosophy, it was the art of depicting the virgin sucker yawning hungrily under the baited hook. His characterization was pointed with such wide-eyed and unsullied innocence, such eager and open-mouthed receptivity, such a succulently plastic amenability to suggestion, such a rich response to flattery—in a word, with such a sublime absorptiveness to the old oil—that men such as Mr. Quarterstone, on becoming conscious of him for the first time, had been known to wipe away a furtive

tear as they dug down into their pockets for first mortgages on the Golden Gate Bridge and formulae for extracting radium from old toothpaste tubes. He used all of that technique on Mr. Homer Quarterstone, so effectively that his enrollment in the Supremax Academy proceeded with the effortless ease of a stratospherist returning to terra firma a short head in front of his punctured balloon. Mr. Quarterstone did not actually brush away an unbidden tear, but he did bring out an enormous leather-bound ledger and enter up particulars of his newest student with a gratifying realization that Life, in spite of the pessimists, was not wholly without its moments of unshadowed joy.

"When can I start?" asked the Saint, when that had been done.

"Start?" repeated Mr. Quarterstone, savouring the word. "Why, whenever you like. Each lesson lasts a full hour, and you can divide them up as you wish. You can start now if you want to. I had an appointment . . ."

"Oh."

"But it is of no importance, compared with this." Mr. Quarterstone picked up the telephone. "Tell Mr. Urlaub I shall be too busy to see him this afternoon," he told it. He hung up. "The producer," he explained, as he settled back again. "Of course you've heard of him. But he can wait. One day he'll be waiting on your doorstep, my boy." He dismissed Mr. Urlaub, the producer, with a majestic *ademán*. "What shall we take first—elocution?"

"You know best, Mr. Quarterstone," said the Saint eagerly.

Mr. Quarterstone nodded. If there was anything that could have increased his contentment, it was a pupil who had no doubt that Mr. Quarterstone knew best. He crossed his legs and hooked one thumb in the armhole of his waistcoat.

"Say, 'Eee.' "

"Eee."

"Ah."

Simon went on looking at him expectantly.

"Ah," repeated Mr. Quarterstone.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said 'Ah.' "

"Oh."

"No, ah."

"Yes, I—"

"Say it after me, Mr. Tombs. 'Aaaah.' Make it ring out. Hold your diaphragm in, open your mouth and bring it up from your chest. This is a little exercise in the essential vowels."

"Oh. Aaaah."

"Oh."

"Oh."

"I."

"I."

"Ooooo."

"Ooooo."

"Wrong."

"I'm sorry . . ."

"Say 'Wrong,' Mr. Tombs."

"Wrong."

"Right," said Mr. Quarterstone.

"Right."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Quarterstone testily. "I—"

"Yes, yes, I."

Mr. Quarterstone swallowed.

"I don't mean you repeat every word I say," he said. "Just the examples. Now let's try the vowels again in a sentence. Say this: 'Faar skiies looom O-ver meee.'"

"Faaar skiiies looom O-ver meee."

"Daaark niight draaws neeear."

"The days are drawing in," Simon admitted politely.

Mr. Quarterstone's smile became somewhat glassy, but whatever else he may have been he was no quitter.

"I'm afraid he is a fraud," Simon told Rosalind Hale when he saw her the next day. "But he has a beautiful line of sugar for the flies. I was the complete gawky goof, the perfect bank clerk with dramatic ambitions—you could just see me going home and leering in the mirror and imagining myself making love to Marilyn Monroe—but he told me he just couldn't believe how anyone with my poise couldn't have had any experience."

The girl's white teeth showed on her lower lip.

"But that's just what he told me!"

"I could have guessed it, darling. And I don't suppose you were the first, either. . . . I had two lessons on the spot, and I've had another two today; and if he can teach anyone anything worth knowing about acting, then I can train ducks to write shorthand. I was so dumb that anyone with an ounce of artistic feeling would have thrown me out of the window, but when I left him this afternoon he almost hugged me and told me he could hardly wait to finish the course before he rushed out to show me to John Van Druten."

She moved her head a little, gazing at him with big sober eyes.

"He was just the same with me, too. Oh, I've been such a fool!"

"We're all fools in our own way," said the Saint consolingly. "Boys like Homer are my job, so they don't bother me. On the other hand, you've no idea what a fool I can be with soft lights and sweet music. Come on to dinner and I'll show you."

"But now you've given Quarterstone a thousand dollars, and what are you going to do about it?"

"Wait for the next act of the stirring drama."

The next act was not long in

developing. Simon had two more of Mr. Quarterstone's special, personal, private, exclusive lessons the next day, and two more the day after—Mr. Homer Quarterstone was no apostle of the old-fashioned idea of making haste slowly, and by getting in two lessons daily he was able to double his temporary income, which then chalked up at the very pleasing figure of two hundred dollars per diem, minus the overhead, of which the brassy blonde was not the smallest item. But this method of gingering up the flow of revenue also meant that its duration was reduced from ten days to five, and during a lull in the next day's first hour (Diction, Gesture and Facial Expression) he took the opportunity of pointing out that Success, while already certain, could never be too certain or too great, and therefore that a supplementary series of lessons in the Art and Technique of the Motion Picture, while involving only a brief delay, could only add to the magnitude of Mr. Tomb's ultimate inevitable triumph.

On this argument, for the first time, Mr. Tombs disagreed.

"I want to see for myself whether I've mastered the first lessons," he said. "If I could get a small part in a play, just to try myself out . . ."

He was distressingly obstinate, and Mr. Quarterstone, either because he convinced himself that it would only be a waste of time, or because another approach to his pupil's remaining nineteen thousand dollars seemed just as simple, finally yielded. He made an excuse to leave the studio for a few minutes, and Simon knew that the next development was on its way.

It arrived in the latter part of the last hour (Declamation with Gestures, Movement and Facial Expression—The Complete Classical Scene).

Mr. Quarterstone was demonstrating.

"To be," trumpeted Mr. Quarterstone, gazing ceilingwards with an ecstatic expression, the chest thrown out, the arms slightly spread, "or not to be." Mr. Quarterstone ceased to be. He slumped, the head bowed, the arms hanging listlessly by the sides, the expression doleful. "That—is the question." Mr. Quarterstone pondered it, shaking his head. The suspense was awful. He elaborated the idea. "Whether 'tis nobler"—Mr. Quarterstone drew himself nobly up, the chin lifted, the right arm turned slightly across the body, the forearm parallel with the ground—"in the mind"—he clutched his brow, where he kept his mind—"to suffer"—he clutched his heart, where he did his suffering—"the slings"—he

stretched out his left hand for the slings—"and arrows"—he flung out his right hand for the arrows—"of outrageous fortune"—Mr. Quarterstone rolled the insult lusciously around his mouth and spat it out with defiance—"or to take arms"—he drew himself up again, the shoulders squared, rising slightly on tiptoe—"against a sea of troubles"—his right hand moved over a broad panorama, undulating symbolically—"and by opposing"—the arms rising slightly from the elbow, fists clenched, shoulders thrown back, chin drawn in—"end them!"—the forearms striking down again with a fierce chopping movement, expressive of finality and knocking a calendar off the table.

"Excuse me," said the brassy blonde, with her head poking around the door. "Mr. Urlaub is here."

"Tchah!" said Mr. Quarterstone, inspiration wounded in mid-flight. "Tell him to wait."

"He said—"

Mr. Quarterstone's eyes dilated. His mouth opened. His hands lifted a little from his sides, the fingers tense and parted rather like plump claws, the body rising. He was staring at the Saint.

"Wait!" he cried. "Of course! The very thing! The very man you've got to meet! One of the greatest producers in the world today! Your chance!"

He leapt a short distance off the ground and whirled on the blonde, his arm flung out, pointing quiveringly.

"Send him in!"

Simon looked wildly breathless.

"But—but will he—"

"Of course he will! You've only got to remember what I've taught you. And sit down. We must be calm!"

Mr. Quarterstone sank into a chair, agitatedly looking calm, as Urlaub bustled in. Urlaub trotted quickly across the room.

"Ah, Homer."

"My dear Waldemar! How is everything?"

"Terrible! I came to ask for your advice . . ."

Mr. Urlaub leaned across the desk. He was a smallish, thin, bouncy man with a big nose and sleek black hair. His suit fitted him as tightly as an extra skin, and the stones in his tiepin and his rings looked enough like diamonds to actually be diamonds. He moved as if he were hung on springs, and his voice was thin and spluttery like the exhaust of an anemic motorcycle.

"Niementhal has quit. Let me down at the last minute. He wanted to put some goddam gigolo into the lead. Some ham that his wife's got hold of. I said to him, 'Aaron, your wife is your business and this play is my business.' I said, 'I don't

care if it hurts your wife's feelings and I don't care if she gets mad at you, I can't afford to risk my reputation on Broadway and my investment in this play by putting that ham in the lead.' I said, 'Buy her a box of candy or a diamond bracelet or anything or send her to Paris or something, but don't ask me to make her happy by putting that gigolo in this play.' So he quit. And me with everything set, and the rest of the cast ready to start rehearsing next week, and he quits. He said, 'All right, then use your own money.' I said, 'You know I've got fifty thousand dollars in this production already, and all you were going to put in is fifteen thousand, and for that you want me to risk my money and my reputation by hiring that ham. I thought you said you'd got a good actor.' 'Well, you find yourself a good actor and fifteen thousand dollars,' he says, and he quits. Cold. And I can't raise another cent—you know how I just tied up half a million to save those aluminum shares."

"That's tough, Waldemar," said Mr. Quarterstone anxiously. "Waldemar, that's tough! . . . Ah — by the way — pardon me—may I introduce a student of mine? Mr. Tombs. . . ."

Urlaub turned vaguely, apparently becoming aware of the Saint's presence for the first time. He started forward with a courteously extended hand as the Saint rose.

But their hands did not meet at once. Mr. Urlaub's approaching movement died slowly away, as if paralysis had gradually overtaken him, so that he finally came to rest just before they met, like a clockwork toy that had run down. His eyes became fixed, staring. His mouth opened.

Then, very slowly, he revived himself. He pushed his hand onwards again and grasped the Saint's as if it were something precious, shaking it slowly and earnestly.

"A pupil of yours, did you say, Homer?" he asked in an awestruck voice.

"That's right. My star pupil, in fact. I might almost say . . ."

Mr. Urlaub paid no attention to what Quarterstone might almost have said. With his eyes still staring, he darted suddenly closer, peered into the Saint's face, took hold of it, turned it from side to side, just as Quarterstone had once done. Then he stepped back and stared again, prowling around the Saint like a dog prowling around a tree. Then he stopped.

"Mr. Tombs," he said vibrantly, "will you walk over to the door, and then walk back towards me?"

Looking dazed, the Saint did so.

Mr. Urlaub looked at him and

gulped. Then he hauled a wad of typescript out of an inside pocket, fumbled through it and thrust it out with one enamelled-fingernail dabbing at a paragraph.

"Read that speech—read it as if you were acting it."

The Saint glanced over the paragraph, drew a deep breath and read with almost uncontrollable emotion.

"No, do not lie to me. You have already given me the answer for which I have been waiting. I am not ungrateful for what you once did for me, but I see now that that kind act was only a part of your scheme to ensnare my better nature in the toils of your unhallowed passions, as though pure love were a thing that could be bought like merchandise. Ah, yes, I loved you, but I did not know that that pretty face was only a mask for the corruption beneath. How you must have laughed at me! Ha, ha. I brought you a rose, but you turned it into a nest of vipers in my bosom. They have stabbed my heart! (Sobs)"

Mr. Urlaub clasped his hands together. His eyes bulged and rolled upwards.

"My God," he breathed hoarsely.

"What?" said the Saint.

"Why?" said Mr. Quarterstone.

"But it's like a miracle!" squeaked Waldemar Urlaub. "He's the man! The type! The face! The figure! The voice! The manner! He is a genius! Homer, where did you find him? The women will storm the theatre." He grasped the Saint by the arm, leaning as far as he could over the desk and over Mr. Quarterstone. "Listen. He must play that part. He must. He is the only man. I couldn't put anyone else in it now. Not after I've seen him. I'll show Aaron Niementhal where he gets off. Quit, did he? Okay. He'll be sorry. We'll have a hit that'll make history!"

"But Waldemar . . ."

Mr. Urlaub dried up. His clutching fingers uncoiled from Simon's arm. The fire died out of his eyes. He staggered blindly back and sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Yes," he whispered bitterly. "I'd forgotten. The play can't go on. I'm sunk, Homer—just for a miserable fifteen grand. And now, of all times, when I've just seen Mr. Tombs!"

"You know I'd help you if I could, Waldemar," said Mr. Quarterstone earnestly. "But I just bought my wife a fur coat, and she wants a new car, and that ranch we just bought in California set me back a hundred thousand."

Mr. Urlaub shook his head.

"I know. It's not your fault. But isn't it just the toughest break?"

Quarterstone shook his head in sympathy. And then he looked at the Saint.

It was quite a performance, that look. It started casually, beheld inspiration, blazed with triumph, winked, glared significantly, poured out encouragement, pleaded, commanded and asked and answered several questions, all in a few seconds. Mr. Quarterstone had not at any period in his career actually held down the job of prompter, but he more than made up with enthusiasm for any lack of experience. Only a man who had been blind from birth could have failed to grasp the idea that Mr. Quarterstone was suggesting, and the Saint had not strung along so far in order to feign blindness at the signal for his entrance.

Simon cleared his throat.

"Er—did you say you only needed another fifteen thousand dollars to put on this play?" he asked diffidently, but with a clearly audible note of suppressed excitement.

After that he had to work no harder than he would have had to work to get himself eaten by a pair of hungry lions. Waldemar Urlaub, once the great light had dawned on him, skittered about like a pea on a drum in an orgy of exultant planning. Mr. Tombs would have starred in the play anyhow, whenever the remainder of the necessary wind had been raised—Urlaub had already made up his mind to that—but if Mr. Tombs had fifteen thousand dollars as well as his genius and beauty, he would be more than a star. He could be co-producer as well, a sharer in the profits, a friend and equal, in every way the heir to the position which the great Aaron Niementhal would have occupied. His name would go on the billing with double force—Urlaub grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil to illustrate it:

Sebastian Tombs
and
Waldemar Urlaub
present
Sebastian Tombs
in
"Love—The Redeemer"

There would also be lights on the theatre, advertisements, photographs, newspaper articles, news items, gossip paragraphs, parties, movie rights, screen tests, Hollywood, London, beautiful and adoring women . . . Mr. Urlaub built up a luminous picture of fame, success and fortune, while Mr. Quarterstone nodded benignly and slapped everybody on the back and beamed at the Saint at intervals with a sublimely smug expression of "I told you so."

"And they did all that to me, too," said Rosalind Hale wryly. "I was practically Sarah Bern-

hardt when they'd finished . . . But I told you just how they did it. Why do you have to let yourself in for the same mess that I got into?"

"The easiest way to rob a bank is from the inside," said the Saint cryptically. "I suppose you noticed that they really have got a play?"

"Yes. I read part of it—the same as you did."

"Did you like it?"

She made a little grimace.

"You've got a right to laugh at me. I suppose that ought to have been warning enough, but Urlaub was so keen about it, and Quarterstone had already made me think he was a great producer, so I couldn't say that I thought it was awful. And then I wondered if it was just because I didn't know enough about plays."

"I don't know much about plays myself," said the Saint. "But the fact remains that Comrade Urlaub has got a complete play, with three acts and everything, god-awful though it is. I took it away with me to read it over and the more I look at it the more I'm thinking that something might be done with it."

Rosalind was aghast.

"You don't mean to say you'd really put your money into producing it?"

"Stranger things have happened," said the Saint thoughtfully. "How bad can a play be before it becomes good? And how much sense of humor is there in the movie business? Haven't you seen those reprints of old two-reelers that they show sometime for a joke, and haven't you heard the audience laughing itself sick? . . . Listen. I only wish I knew who wrote *Love—the Redeemer.* I've got an idea . . ."

Mr. Homer Quarterstone could have answered his question for him, for the truth was that the author of *Love—the Redeemer* resided under the artistic black Homburg of Mr. Homer Quarterstone. It was a matter of considerable grief to Mr. Quarterstone that no genuine producer had ever been induced to see eye to eye with him on the subject of the superlative merits of that amorous masterpiece, so that after he had grown weary of collecting rejections, Mr. Quartersone had been reduced to the practical expedient of using his magnum opus as one of the props in the more profitable but by no means less artistic drama from which he and Mr. Urlaub derived their precarious incomes; but his loyalty to the child of his brain had never been shaken.

It was therefore with a strange squirmy sensation in the pit of his stomach that Mr. Quarterstone sat in his office a few mornings later and gazed at a card in the bottom left-hand

corner of which were the magic words, *"Paragon Pictures, Inc., Hollywood, Calif."* A feeling of fate was about him, as if he had been unexpectedly reminded of a still-cherished childhood dream.

"Show her in," he said with husky magnificence.

The order was hardly necessary, for she came in at once, shepherded by a beaming Waldemar Urlaub.

"Just thought I'd give you a surprise, Homer," he explained boisterously. "Did your heart jump when you saw that card? Well, so did mine. Still, it's real. I fixed it all up. Sold her the play. 'You can't go wrong,' I said, 'with one of the greatest drammers ever written.' "

Mrs. Wohlbreit turned her back on him coldly and inspected Mr. Quarterstone. She looked nothing like the average man's conception of a female from Hollywood, being gaunt and masculine with a sallow lined face and gold-rimmed glasses and mousey hair plastered back above her ears, but Mr. Quarterstone had at least enough experience to know that women were used in Hollywood in executive positions which did not call for the decorative qualities of more publicized employees.

She said in her cold masculine voice: "Is this your agent?"

Mr. Quarterstone swallowed.

"Ah—"

"Part owner," said Mr. Urlaub eagerly. "That's right, isn't it, Homer? You know our agreement—fifty-fifty in everything. Eh? Well, I've been working on this deal—"

"I asked you," said Mrs. Wohlbreit penetratingly, "because I understand that you're the owner of this play we're interested in. There are so many chiselers in this business that we make it our policy to approach the author first direct—if he wants to take in any ten-percenters afterwards, that's his affair. A Mr. Tombs brought me the play first, and told me he had an interest in it. I found out that he got it from Mr. Urlaub, so I went to him. Mr. Urlaub told me that you were the original author. Now, who am I to talk business with?"

Mr. Quarterstone saw his partner's mouth opening for another contribution.

"With—with us," he said weakly.

It was not what he might have said if he had had time to think, but he was too excited to be particular.

"Very well," said Mrs. Wohlbreit. "We've read this play, *Love—the Redeemer,* and we think it would make a grand picture. If you haven't done anything yet about the movie rights . . ."

Mr. Quarterstone drew him-

self up. He felt as if he was in a daze from which he might be rudely awakened at any moment, but it was a beautiful daze. His heart was thumping, but his brain was calm and clear. It was, after all, only the moment with which he had always known that his genius must ultimately be rewarded.

"Ah—yes," he said with resonant calm. "The movie rights are, for the moment, open to—ah—negotiation. Naturally, with a drama of such quality, dealing as it does with a problem so close to the lives of every member of the thinking public, and appealing to the deepest emotions and beliefs of every intelligent man and woman—"

"We thought it would make an excellent farce," said Mrs. Wohlbreit blandly. "It's just the thing we've been looking for for a long time." But before the stricken Mr. Quarterstone could protest, she had added consolingly: "We could afford to give you thirty thousand dollars for the rights."

"Ah—quite," said Mr. Quarterstone bravely.

By the time that Mrs. Wohlbreit had departed, after making an appointment for the contract to be signed and the check paid over at the Paragon offices the following afternoon, his wound had healed sufficiently to let him take Mr. Urlaub in his arms, as soon as the door closed, and embrace him fondly in an impromptu rumba.

"Didn't I always tell you that play was a knockout?" he crowed. "It's taken 'em years to see it, but they had to wake up in the end. Thirty thousand dollars! Why, with that money I can—" He sensed a certain stiffness in his dancing partner and hastily corrected himself: "I mean, we—we can—"

"Nuts," said Mr. Urlaub coarsely. He disengaged himself and straightened the creases out of his natty suit. "What you've got to do now is sit down and figure out a way to crowbar that guy Tombs out of this."

Mr. Quarterstone stopped dancing suddenly and his jaw dropped.

"Tombs?"

"Yeah! He wasn't so dumb. He had the sense to see that that play of yours was the funniest thing ever written. When we were talking about it in here he must have thought we thought it was funny, too."

Mr. Quarterstone was appalled as the idea of duplicity struck him.

"Waldemar—d'you think he was trying to—"

"No. I pumped the old battle-axe on the way here. He told her he only had a part interest, but he wanted to do something for the firm and give us a surprise—he thought he could play

the lead in the picture, too."

"Has she told him—"

"Not yet. You heard what she said. She gets in touch with the author first. But we got to get him before he gets in touch with her. Don't you remember those contracts we signed yesterday? Fifty percent of the movie rights for him!"

Mr. Quarterstone sank feebly on to the desk.

"Fifteen thousand dollars!" he groaned. Then he brightened tentatively. "But it's all right, Waldemer. He agreed to put fifteen thousand dollars into producing the play, so we just call it quits and we don't have to give him anything."

"You great fat lame-brained slob," yelped Mr. Urlaub affectionately. "Quits! Like hell it's quits! D'you think I'm not going to put that play on, after this? It took that old battle-axe to see it, but she's right. They'll be rolling in the aisles!" He struck a Quarterstoneish attitude. "'I brought you a rose,'" he uttered tremulously, "'but you turned it into a nest of vipers in my bosom. They have stabbed my heart!' My God! It's a natural! I'm going to put it on Broadway whatever we have to do to raise the dough—but we aren't going to cut that mug Tombs in on it."

Mr. Quarterstone winced.

"It's all signed up legal," he said dolefully. "We'll have to spend our own dough and buy him out."

"Get your hat," said Mr. Urlaub shortly. "We'll cook up a story on the way."

When Rosalind Hale walked into the Saint's apartment at the Waldorf-Astoria that afternoon, Simon Templar was counting crisp new hundred-dollar bills into neat piles.

"What have you been doing?" she said. "Burgling a bank?"

The Saint grinned.

"The geetus came out of a bank, anyway," he murmured. "But Comrades Quarterstone and Urlaub provided the checks. I just went out and cashed them."

"You mean they bought you out?"

"After a certain amount of haggling and squealing—yes. Apparently Aaron Niementhal changed his mind about backing the show, and Urlaub didn't want to offend him on account of Aaron offered to cut him in on another and bigger and better proposition at the same time; so they gave me ten thousand dollars to tear up the contracts, and the idea is that I ought to play the lead in Niementhal's bigger and better show."

She pulled off her hat and collapsed into a chair. She was no longer gaunt and masculine and forbidding, for she had changed out of a badly fitting

tweed suit and removed her sallow make-up and thrown away the gold-rimmed glasses and fluffed out her hair again so that it curled in its usual soft brown waves around her face, so that her last resemblance to anyone by the name of Wohlbreit was gone.

"Ten thousand dollars," she said limply. "It doesn't seem possible. But it's real. I can see it."

"You can touch it, if you like," said the Saint. "Here." He pushed one of the stacks over the table towards her. "Fifteen hundred that you paid Quarterstone for tuition." He pushed another. "Four thousand that you put into the play." He drew a small sheaf towards himself. "One thousand that I paid for my lessons. Leaving three thousand five hundred drops of gravy to be split two ways."

He straightened the remaining pile, cut it in two and slid half of it on to join the share that was accumulating in front of her.

She stared at the money helplessly for a second or two, reached out and touched it with the tips of her fingers, and then suddenly she came round the table and flung herself into his arms. Her cheek was wet where it touched his face.

"I don't know how to say it," she said shakily. "But you know what I mean."

"There's only one thing bothering me," said the Saint some time later, "and that's whether you're really entitled to take back those tuition fees. After all, Homer made you a good enough actress to fool himself. Maybe he was entitled to a percentage, in spite of everything."

His doubts, however, were set at rest several months afterwards, when he had traveled a long way from New York and many other things had happened, when one day an advertisement in a New York paper caught his eye:

14th Week!

Sold out 3 months ahead!

The Farce Hit of the Season:

LOVE—THE REDEEMER

by Homer Quarterstone

IMPERIAL THEATRE

A Waldemar Urlaub Production

Simon Templar was not often at a loss for words, but on this occasion he was tongue-tied for a long time. And then, at last, he lay back and laughed helplessly.

"Oh, well," he said. "I guess they earned it."

the knaves' messenger

by . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim

It was a strange war between this striking and dangerous woman, and the chief of this branch of the Secret Service.

IT WAS just before midday on one of the wettest March mornings I ever remember that Louis, manager of the Milan Grill Room and my associate in many recorded and unrecorded enterprises, rang me up in my apartment.

"Major Lyson?" he asked.

"Speaking."

"The weather being unpropitious," Louis went on, "I had hopes of finding you in. Will you do me the favor of stepping down and taking an aperitif in my room with an old friend from Marseilles who has just arrived?"

"With great pleasure," I assented.

"I am not disturbing your work?"

"On the contrary," I assured him, "I am reading the midday *STANDARD* with my eyes upon the clock."

"Excellent."

I descended by the lift and knocked at the door of Louis's apartment. I found him seated in his favorite easy chair and opposite to him a middle-aged man of fair complexion wearing

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For more than a generation millions have enjoyed the stories of Crime and intrigue by E. Phillips Oppenheim, a name synonymous with the Mystery Novel. He is best remembered for THE GREAT PRINCE SHAN *and* PETER RUFF AND THE DOUBLE FOUR. *Now—read of the strange doings at the Milan Grill Room.*

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rather heavy spectacles; very neat, very alert, exceedingly polite.

"Monsieur Raynal," Louis added to his formal introduction, "was for many years *Chef de la Sureté* in Marseilles. After the war he established himself in Paris. I think, except for an American concern which seems to be run with the sole idea of providing evidence for American divorces, Monsieur Raynal is the principal of the only respectable and reliable detective agency in France."

Monsieur Raynal bowed.

"My friend is too kind," he said, "yet in a sense his words are true. My work in Marseilles was connected with crime and crime only, Major, and I wearied of it. I desired a larger field of operations. I flatter myself that I have found one."

"Monsieur," Louis confided, "receives frequent commissions from the French Government."

"I am delighted to meet him," I said. "I have often heard of his establishment."

Jose entered with a tray of cocktails. We raised our glasses and drank to one another.

"Your position, Major Lyson," the visitor declared as we settled down in our chairs, "has always moved me to envy. A liaison between the police and the military is a thing that is sadly lacking in our country. Monsieur Louis, with a finger so often in the pie, must find life full of interest."

"I have never found life dull," Louis mediated. "Just lately, however, there has been very little stirring. Sinners seem to have repented, criminals to have deserted us for the provinces. Even a continental spy is a rarity."

Monsieur Raynal took off his spectacles and rubbed them with the corner of his silk handkerchief. He blinked a little and readjusted them.

"Perhaps," he suggested cautiously, "my visit over here may stir things up for you. I could give you the dossier of a man and woman living in this hotel which I think would prove interesting reading. What might interest you still more would be my possession of certain evidence concerning these two which would seem to denote that they are over here on business."

"Can you tell us their names?" I asked.

Monsieur Raynal reached forward for a piece of paper and scribbled upon it for a moment. He passed it to Louis who then handed it to me.

Monsieur et Madame Tegnier,
17, Avenue du Bois
de Boulogne,
Paris

"I know nothing whatever about them," Louis confessed in reply to an enquiring gaze.

"You may possibly recall the fact that Madame Tegnier was once known as Claire Montigny."

"I seem to find the name familiar," I said thoughtfully. "It was a Claire Montigny, was it not, who was tried for espionage towards the end of the war?"

"Claire Montigny was involved in two other *causes celebres* besides her trial for espionage," Monsieur Raynal remarked. "I did not come here, however, to talk of the lady's past. I am here to speak of the present. We have received a commission to investigate the negotiations which we suspect are now being carried on between Monsieur and Madame Tegnier and the representative of a foreign nation. It is in connection with this commission that I pay my call upon Monsieur Louis."

"Any assistance we could offer—" Louis murmured.

"You will understand the difficulties of my position," Monsieur Raynal interrupted. "As the *Chef de la Sureté* of Marseilles I was a sufficiently well known figure in Paris. As the head of a famous detective agency I have become, alas, the victim of the caricaturist and the columnist. I have lost the one inevitable quality my position demands—the quality of anonymity. Wherever I go I am known. More or less this applies to the principal members of my staff. That is why I make my appeal to my old friend—I ask him to help—and because your department, Major, is, we believe concerned in the present movements of the Tegniers, we beg also for your co-operation. Here in the hotel I hide myself. I can do nothing. I cannot even lunch or dine in public. A single glance at me and away would go the two people I have followed here. Mind you, from my rooms, which I seldom quit except when I know that our friends have plans for the evening, I direct the operations of certain of my staff who keep a constant guard upon the Tegniers. I have brought two men over who are strangers to them and who report to me daily. But it is not enough. I need something more intimate."

"We should require more evidence than we now possess," Louis pointed out, "to be of any practical use. For instance, upon what criminal exploit do you suspect these two people to be engaged at present?"

"Whole-hearted espionage on behalf of a foreign Power," Raynal replied. "They have just arrived from Toulon, where we have discovered they have been in communication with a naval man from across the North Sea."

Louis stroked his small black imperial thoughtfully.

"*Mon ami,*" he observed, "it appears to me that you are too guarded in your confidences. Major Lyson and I are your good allies but the road for interference in the matters you speak of would be hard for us to find or follow."

"In plain words," I ventured, "you will have to part with a little more of the information you have already collected."

Monsieur Raynal assented cheerfully.

"I do not expect impossibilities," he said. "All I can do is to pave the way. A maître d'hôtel of the restaurant who is in my confidence has given them quite casually a hint that a distinguished French official has engaged one of his tables. They naturally do not wish to be in his immediate vicinity twice during every day and they have announced their intention of moving up into the Grill Room. That, at any rate, will bring you into closer contact with them."

"It is a step in that direction," Louis agreed.

"Furthermore," Raynal continued, "I have a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Scotland Yard and another to a department of the Secret Service with which you are connected, Major Lyson. These letters shall be presented this afternoon. They are not, strictly speaking official, but they will carry weight—of that I assure you, gentlemen. Indeed they will carry weight."

"Are you staying here in your own name, Monsieur?" I asked.

"I have a suite on the eighth floor in the Court in the name of Delisser," Raynal replied. "My visiting card announces me as an Importer of French, Spanish and African Wines. It is from my rooms in the Court that any information I can pass on to you will emanate and where my helpers over here report."

Louis finished his aperitif and rose to his feet.

"I take it, *chér Monsieur*," he said, "that our little conference is at an end."

"For the moment," the other answered, also rising to his feet. "With you and me, Monsieur Louis, things are different. We have been friends for many years. You will permit me, I trust, now and then to pay you a visit."

We all three shook hands. Monsieur Raynal expressed the happiness he had gained from making my acquaintance. Nevertheless, in the lobby of the Grill Room half an hour later, he glanced at me with the idle curiosity of a stranger. A man, I decided, who was at least thorough in his methods.

Without a doubt the two most distinguished-looking people in the Grill Room that day were Monsieur and Madame Tegnier.

Monsieur was a man somewhere between forty and fifty years of age, carefully if somewhat sombrely dressed, with a deep purple tie arranged in the old-fashioned four-in-hand style and fastened by a beautiful pearl pin. His hair was gray, he was clean-shaven and he displayed a great deal of animation in his conversation with his beautiful wife. Claire Tegnier wore one of those black tailored suits at which the French *couturier* excels. Her hat was becoming, her short veil chic. For a Frenchwoman she was very little made up and her expression was all the time charming, her manner as she chattered away to her husband most agreeable. The greatest of French dramatists and the only French actor who has ever had any success in England lingered at their table for a few minutes to indulge in the pleasantries of intimates. They were over to arrange for the production of a play now running in Paris which Madame praised most eloquently. It was hard for me to associate these two with their distinguished acquaintances; it was hard to reconcile their whole-hearted devotion to their elaborately ordered luncheon and to one another with any of the sinister things hinted at by Monsieur Raynal. If indeed they were playing a part they were the cleverest dissemblers I had ever come across. I was just commencing my sole when my immediate superior, Sub-Commissioner Colonel Heywood, with an afternoon paper under his arm, strolled down and, with a little nod of greeting, took the vacant place at my table.

"So you have been giving the old mariners a scare this morning," he remarked.

"All that I have been doing," I replied, "was to ring up on the private line and ask for an interview with Hudson of the Intelligence for this afternoon."

"Well, that is not an everyday occurrence, is it?"

"I suppose not," I admitted. "Just a moment, Colonel, before I go on. What do you think of those two at the next table but one?"

Heywood ordered his luncheon before he replied, studying the menu carefully. When he put it down he glanced casually across at the table I had indicated.

"Very best type of French people, I should say. The woman's face seems a little familiar. Anything going on here!"

"Raynal is over," I confided. "Come to see Louis."

"You mean the man who is head of the Detective Agency?"

I nodded.

"He is over on some Government business."

"Espionage, I suppose?"

I nodded.

"And those two are in it."

Heywood poured himself out a glass from the half bottle of white wine which he had ordered and sipped it deliberately.

"I'm sick of espionage," he confided.

"So, I should imagine, is the lady whom you admire," I told him. "I have just been reading a copy of her dossier which Raynal sent round to my rooms. She was once tried for her life. She got off—famous case, if you remember it. There were rumors about the judge. Anyway, he never sat again and the woman disappeared. Now she is married to her present companion Tegnier—a mysterious millionaire. They think in Paris that they have something on the pair and they have sent Raynal over. Poor chap, he doesn't know where to move. As he complains, he cannot function here. All these people know who he is. He has a couple of men at work and he is off into hiding somewhere to receive their reports."

"I don't see," Heywood reflected, "why he came to you."

"Louis is an old friend of his. Knew him before the war when he was Chief Constable in Marseilles. He has had an inkling from somewhere of the show we put up now and then and he thought we might help."

"It's a curious situation," Colonel Heywood remarked. "The possible criminals, anyway the suspects, come out into the open. The forces of law and order whose object it is to bring them to justice go into hiding. To tell you the truth, Lyson, I think that the authorities who engaged Raynal and sent him over here made a mistake."

"So do I."

The telephone boy came from the small lounge outside and made his way to our table. He handed a slip of paper to Heywood, who glanced at it and rose to his feet.

"Office calling me," he remarked. "I'll be back directly, Lyson."

I saw no more of Colonel Heywood until late in the day, however. The boy returned and delivered a message.

"Colonel's very sorry, sir. He had to hurry off," he reported. "Will you pay his bill and he'll settle up tomorrow."

"Has he gone already?" I asked.

"It was an urgent call, sir," the youth confided.

I signed Heywood's bill with my own and left the table. Neither Madame nor Monsieur even glanced up at my departure. They seemed both to be enjoying a story which Madame had just told.

Admiral Hudson, who was chief of a certain branch of our Secret Service, kept me waiting for a few minutes before I was

passed into his sanctum. He looked up at my entrance, nodded and motioned me to a chair. I noticed that he had been writing with his own hand on a sheet of paper in front of him and that three code books lay open by his elbow as though he had been studying them. He was a small man with rather a wizened face —very sunburnt—a humorous mouth and black searching eyes.

"Well, Major, what can we do for you?" he asked. "Not often are we troubled with anyone in your profession."

He listened to what I had to say, which really was not very much.

"I know who you mean by Raynal, of course," he said, "although I have never met him. What's the trouble?"

"I have no definite information," I acknowledged, "but I expect you remember the trial of Claire Montigny?"

"Of course I do," the Admiral replied. "Supposed to have got round the judge and escaped being shot."

"She has been down at Toulon with the man to whom she is now married," I told him. "A man named Tegnier. There's some mystery about what they were doing there but the French authorities got on to it that she was up to no good and had her watched. Nothing happened. She's too clever: Knows everyone of the French Naval Police. She disappeared with her husband just as they were making a pounce on her. The next thing they knew she was in London at the Milan Hotel. They had the idea of employing Raynal to watch her here. Not a bit of good. He was an old pal of Louis's—Louis is manager of the Milan Grill Room, you know—and he came to ask if we could help in getting a line on what the woman was up to. At the present moment she has Raynal's two men, an understudy of Heywood's from Scotland Yard, Louis and myself all watching her."

"What is it she is dealing in —plans, correspondence, maps, or what?" the Admiral demanded.

"No one knows," I told him. "They got away from Toulon and they turned up in London. The French authorities have not told even Raynal, the man they are employing, what it is they are afraid of, but those two—Claire Montigny and the man she has married—have got hold of something useful and they are just waiting their opportunity to slip it on to its destination."

"Nervous work, that," the Admiral reflected. "I went through it once myself towards the end of the war at the time when I had lost all my best men. One gets to fancy that everyone is watching you. They aren't, of course, but the feeling's just as

bad. You have your suspicions about me at this moment, haven't you, Major?"

"I think you know more than you feel like telling, sir," I answered.

"I thought so," he chuckled. "Well, I dare say you will know the whole truth before I shall. If so you must return good for evil and come and tell me all about it."

He touched a bell. I rose to my feet.

"You are wondering why I don't tell you a little more, aren't you, Major?" he asked as he held out his hand.

"Jealousy between the services, sir?" I suggested.

"Go to hell!" was the Admiral's farewell.

"You know, Louis, it isn't fair," I said when I went in to see him for a minute before dinner. "That damned French detective comes here and asks for our help and tells us nothing."

Louis stroked his chin for a moment.

"Is that your impression, Major?"

"I'm sure of it. They know more about this affair at the Admiralty than you and I. We are simply being asked to work in the dark."

"Not altogether," Louis disagreed. "We are only asked to watch. At any moment we may be asked to do more than watch and when that moment comes we shall understand what it's all about."

"I hate all this secrecy," I declared, shaking myself a cocktail.

"Then you should have chosen a different branch of your profession," Louis observed with a twinkle in his eyes. . . .

I was supposed to be dining with some friends at Ranelagh that evening but the sight of Claire Tegnier and her husband seated at the same table they had occupied for luncheon was too much for me. I took my accustomed place and very soon I was glad of it. The Tegniers were entertaining the famous couple who had spoken to them at luncheon time and also a popular French actress whom I knew quite well by sight. To all appearance they were a carefree, happy and brilliant little party and no one contributed more to the conversation than Claire Tegnier, no one seemed more thoroughly at his ease than her husband. They were not in evening clothes, but in the Grill Room and especially amongst French people there was nothing remarkable about that. I chose my dinner carefully and ate slowly. The scraps of conversation which I overheard, however, were absolutely uninteresting. Over my coffee I reassembled in my mind my ideas concerning these few people.

There was Claire Tegnier and her husband engaged to our certain knowledge upon a work of espionage, their operations with regard to which being conducted in a subtle and original way. There was Raynal, a very astute French detective. There was Scotland Yard working under the direction of Colonel Heywood, willing to go to almost any lengths in answer to our ally's appeal. There was Admiral Hudson who probably knew more than any of the rest of us but not enough to formulate a plan. There was Louis and there was myself. The Tegniers were too clever not to know that they were being watched, too clever to attempt any concealment about their movements, playing a waiting game apparently perfectly secure and entirely free from anxiety. What was the secret of their confidence? I became so absorbed with my own thoughts and speculations that I scarcely noticed Heywood's entry. He sank into his usual chair and waved the waiter away.

"I had a sandwich before I came out," he explained to me as he cut and lit a cigar. "I see that our friends are as brazen as ever, facing the world with clear consciences and brave hearts!"

"And even contemplating an evening's amusement," I muttered, pointing to the messenger with a theater plan who was standing at Tegnier's elbow. Heywood rose to his feet.

"I imagine we are as safe up in your room as we are likely to be anywhere," he said. "I have a word or two to say to you."

I signed my bill and we made our way to my apartment.

"Every new thing that comes to light," Heywood remarked as he threw himself into an easy chair, "seems to make the affair more confusing. The most highly trained and most expert searchers we possess have been through their rooms and every one of their belongings since luncheon time. Not one sign of papers, maps, documents or correspondence of the slightest interest have they discovered and yet not half an hour ago Hudson confided to me that he had received a telephone message from Paris assuring him that these two are in possession of certain information with regard to the disposition of the French Eastern Defense Army which a certain foreign Power has been trying to get hold of for a long time."

"Do you suppose," I asked, "that they have already passed the information on?"

"From what Hudson told me, they have not had a chance," Heywood assured me. "They have been watched from the moment they left Toulon until they entered this hotel. There is an official censorship at work here

now. Every letter that leaves addressed to a certain country is opened. These people write no letters, they are making no arrangements to leave the country. Everything that they do is absolutely ordinary except that every night they visit music halls."

"Music halls?" I repeated. "Just what do you mean by that nowadays?"

"Well, a certain type of entertainment," Heywood explained. "They were at the Holborn Empire last night, the Victoria Palace every night the week before and Shepherd's Bush Empire several times. They always take a box, they don't hide themselves and they sit through the entertainment. You heard me speak to the head porter just before we came up. I asked him about the theater plan. Tonight they are going to the Holborn Empire again. That will be for the second or third time."

"It sounds odd," I admitted, "but I don't see how it can have any bearing upon the question."

"They are both people of taste," Heywood continued. "What can they find in vaudeville worth their attention?"

"Where did you say they are going tonight?" I asked.

"The Holborn Empire."

I picked up the evening paper. I ran through the list of entertainers—all old-stagers, not a foreigner amongst them except some wrestlers.

"Any light, my young friend?" Heywood enquired.

"Not a vestige," I answered. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, though, Colonel. I'm going to change into an old suit, get a cap and buy a half-crown place in the pit of the Holborn Empire."

"Won't do you any good," my companion sighed. "Raynal's two men have watched their entrance and watched them come out at every place of entertainment they have visited."

That was rather a facer. I carried out my idea, however. Heywood took his leave, I changed my clothes, left the Milan by the service entrance, made my way to the Holborn Empire and struggled through to the front row of the pit. From here I watched wrestlers and gymnasts; I listened to manly baritones singing about warriors of past days; I watched, and worse-still listened to, arch little coquettes lifting their legs and singing out their souls to earn a supper from their admirers at the back of the orchestra. A magician bored me stiff, a girl who remembered the dates of battles drove me to despair and then I looked towards the box where Monsieur and Madame Tegnier had been seated and I saw that Monsieur Tegnier was still there but Madame had

gone. I pushed my way out as ruthlessly as I had butted my way in. I walked up and down the promenade, visited the bars and pulled aside a curtain and glanced across the crowded house. Madame Tegnier was still absent. I think it was just as I dropped the curtain that the idea came to me. It was illuminating. It took my breath away. It staggered me. I went round to the front of the house and made my way to the manager's office.

The manager was none too pleased to see me. I did not particularly fancy myself at that hour in the evening in a shabby blue serge suit and a tweed cap.

"Howlett," I said. "You remember me?"

"I'm damned if I do!" he answered.

"Look again."

"Why, it's Lyson!" he exclaimed. "I beg your pardon, I'm sure, Major, but what the dickens are you doing masquerading in those clothes?"

"Never mind," I said. "I want you to take me round to the back."

"Business or pleasure?" he asked.

"Strictly, absolutely business," I assured him.

We made our way through the usual turmoil at the back of the stage and in due course we reached the region of the dressing-rooms.

"Who do you want to see?" the manager asked.

"I want to stroll about a bit," I confided. "You have some people in front in whom I am interested. The lady has just left her box. She is not in the theater. I'm wondering whether she has a friend behind."

"Madame Claire Tegnier?"

"That's the lady."

He took me by the arm.

"That woman is foolish," he said. "She has a wild fancy for Ada Green."

"The girl with the memory?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Is Madame in her room?"

"She generally is. Seems to me she follows the girl around."

"You couldn't take me somewhere where I could overhear what they are talking about?" I begged. "It is Government business, you know, Howlett. I'm not doing this for amusement."

"A shabby, sloppy little girl like Ada Green," he murmured. "Well, come along."

He led me past a line of dressing-rooms. Arrived at a certain number he paused, drew a pass-key from his pocket and entered. The room was empty. He raised his finger to his lips.

"If it interests you to know what a woman like Claire Tegnier has to say to a shabby little thing like Ada Green you can listen," he said. "I'll be back before long."

He closed the door softly. I crept near to the partition. I heard a tired, sleepy voice—I had heard it a few minutes before from the stage—repeating what seemed to be an endless rigmarole of figures. Suddenly I stiffened to attention. The recital of figures had come to an end. The same voice continued:

"From here to the village of La Tolliere is two kilometers and a quarter. The control of this whole district is from the Mill House. Here there are instruments so arranged that the Mill House itself, with the asphalt walk leading to it, recedes and space is left for the egress of the plane."

"That will do, Ada," I heard a charming voice say. "You are absolutely perfect. You have not made a single mistake."

"I never make mistakes," was the tired response.

"You are sure you know what you have to do?"

There was a note of scorn in the brief reply.

"Madame, you have had reason to discover for yourself that I forget nothing. Give me half of the thousand pounds."

I listened to the rustling sound of bank-notes and afterwards to the tearing up of many sheets of paper. Then I heard Claire Tegnier's voice again.

"From beginning to end your recital tonight is perfect. Now we have finished. You take the 'Golden Arrow' tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock from Victoria. At Calais you will be met and conducted by aeroplane to your destination, where you will be met again. The man who shows you a photograph of me with three crosses in the left-hand corner is the man you may trust. You go with him; you recite all that I have told you."

"And the other five hundred pounds, Madame?"

"He will hand it over to you."

I was back at the Milan Court at eleven o'clock. It took me a quarter of an hour to change and appear downstairs decently clad. All the time half a dozen telephones were ringing furiously with messages from me to Heywood and Admiral Hudson. They were there when I descended into the Grill Room. Raynal I had not ventured to summon.

"Admiral," I said, "and Colonel Heywood—I am going to brag."

"Go ahead," the Admiral invited. "You military fellows can't help it."

"I have discovered exactly how Claire Tegnier proposes to communicate secret information of enormous importance to the person who is willing to pay for it on the other side of the North Sea."

"Then you beat me," the Admiral said, sipping his cocktail.

"I know what the information is but that is as far as I have got."

"And I know this," Heywood announced. "It consists of a multiplicity of figures and measurements and I know that there is not a scrap of written matter anywhere about the Tegniers' luggage or anywhere about their room. They have a safety vault in the hotel. There is not a line of writing anywhere in any one of the compartments. Neither of them have a banking account under any name. How is it that you, my dear Lyson, have learnt this thing?"

I unrolled the program I had brought from the theater.

"You will observe," I pointed out, "that one of the minor star turns tonight at the Holborn Empire, last week at the Victoria Palace, the week before at Shepherd's Bush Empire, is Ada Green, the niece of the man with the eternal memory."

"What in hell has that got to do with it?" the Admiral demanded.

"I know that night after night Claire Tegnier has recited to this young woman in her dressing-room, in whatever theater she has performed, the plan which I have definite information exists for concealing 884 aeroplanes in secret hiding places behind the Maginot Line. That is what Claire Tegnier and her husband found in Toulon. The papers now are destroyed. Their substance remains in the brain of one shabbily-dressed, miserable-looking monkey of a girl with the inherited brain of an uncle who was a star of the music-halls thirty years ago."

"My God!" the Admiral murmured.

"It is up to you two," I continued, "to finish this business. The girl is there and she can recite from beginning to end every geographical and mathamatical detail that is required to enable an enemy to destroy a secondary force behind the greatest line of defense in the world.

"She will leave Victoria at eleven tomorrow morning. She is met at Calais and escorted to a foreign capital. She will then recite everything that she has been told and having listened to her I do not think that she will make a single mistake. To deal with the matter further is not in my province."

There was a brief interlude. Within a few yards of us the Tegniers, who had come in late, the great playwright, the great actor and two more lady friends were seated at the round table laughing and talking. For a moment or two I envied Heywood. I could see the little smile at the corners of his lips. I knew that he was planning things. The Admiral was leaning back in his chair with both hands in his pockets and a scowl upon his

forehead. Heywood turned gently towards me.

"Have you the girl's address?" he asked.

I looked at him reproachfully.

"Colonel," I remonstrated, "the girl is staying at number 7, Gloucester Place on the third floor. Her name is written on a card and pinned on the outside panel. She reached home three quarters of an hour ago and shut herself up for the night. She has ordered a taxi at ten tomorrow morning and at the present moment I should imagine is engaged in packing her belongings."

Heywood laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"Our heads are a little turned," he said. "Forgive me. I have a plan."

I will give them their due—they stood me a dinner the following night. We went almost brazenly into Louis's room to shake hands. We promised him a later visit and we sat round my own particular table in the Grill Room.

"The English Press," I declared, "is a rotten institution. There is not a single word of the dramatic happenings of today in any edition."

My two companions smiled.

"Even the Press," Heywood pointed out, "has its limitations. A little story that it dare not print is here in a few simple words for you, my dear Lyson. At ten o'clock this morning a taxi cab left number 7, Gloucester Place. Inside was a plain, sallow-faced little girl. It was not an uneventful journey. At a certain point in the road towards Victoria the taxicab lost a wheel, skidded violently and the young lady in some mysterious way hit her head against the side of the vehicle. Very quickly she was transferred to a car which happened to be in the vicinity. She was taken to a hospital. The doctor who examined her gave her a hypodermic injection. Afterwards she was allowed to leave and continue her journey. She reached Victoria in time for her train. Her kind lady patroness was there to assist her into her carriage. The lady was perhaps a little alarmed by the girl's appearance and by a certain change in her manner. In the coupe of the Pullman she took her hand.

" 'Ada,' she said. 'Let me hear the first part.'

"Ada shook her head.

" 'Since I came out of the hospital,' she said, 'I can remember nothing.' "

"Would I be asking too much," I interrupted, "if I asked how you two know what took place in a coupe of the Pullman car between Miss Ada Green and the lady in question?"

"You will ask other questions, I dare say," Colonel Heywood

said smiling. "We shall answer them. The coupe was prepared for Madame and Mademoiselle, and neither the Admiral nor I nor two other of our friends were very far away."

"I am satisfied. Go on, please."

"Madame Tegnier was thunderstruck.

" 'Tell me precisely what has happened to you, Ada,' she insisted.

"The young woman told her. It was by that time ten minutes to eleven. Claire Tegnier rose to her feet. She had no word of farewell for the girl. She herself knew what she was facing. She stepped out of the coupe, she stepped out of the Pullman. Then there was that familiar tap upon her arm.

" 'If Madame could spare us a few minutes—' "

"We may conclude," I said, "that that is the end for the moment of Madame Tegnier, but what about little Miss Ada Green?"

"She will receive," Heywood told me, "a pension of a thousand a year. She will never recover her memory fully but she will have enough left of vitality and intelligence to pass through life contentedly. Anything else you would like to know?"

"Nothing."

We raised our glasses which the sommelier had just filled again.

"We will drink," the Admiral proposed, "to the one profession in the world."

So we drank. There was nothing more to be said. *L'affaire Tegnier* was ended. Afterwards we went in and told Louis all about it.

HOW IS YOUR CRIME I.Q.? *A New Feature*

How well do you really know your Underworld jargon?

For instance, do you know that a *coffee grinder* is a machine gun, while a *brownie* is a heavy machine gun, *dream gum* is opium, *ducker* is a Dodge automobile, a *cadillac* is an ounce package of cocaine, and a *businessman* is a witness or a policeman who will accept a bribe?

If someone talks about an *angel*, they mean someone who is paying protection money, and if someone is suspected of being a *buzzman*, there's reason to believe he's an informer. On the other hand, if a *cannon* is doing the *buzz*, this means a pickpocket is working the purse-snatching racket in crowded supermarkets. If you're taken down to *Coney Island*, you're being third-degreed, while if you're *coming down the hill* in *college* you're serving the second half of your sentence in a state penitentiary. And if someone has been *cooking soup*, he's been dissolving a stock of dynamite in hot water to extract crude nitro-glycerine.

exactly five thirty-five

by . . . Lawrence Treat

NURSING his cab along the inside traffic lane and keeping one eye peeled for a fare, Terry McClane thought about five bucks.

He needed it. Here he was taking Annie out tonight, and he was broke. And if she ever found that out, she'd back off and fall into the arms of the first cop with a good, steady income, and a pension ahead of him. Because Annie was not only pretty, but she thought things through.

Terry grazed a couple of pedestrians while his mind dwelt on Annie.

Dark eyes like the evening sky, and lips as soft as the edge of a cloud. And she'd practically told him she was his, if he could prove he was a steady man, with some money in the bank.

Terry gulped. The man said he'd croak him for the pleasure of it. "Nobody hears what goes on. Soundproofed."

He'd argued the point with her, and lost. For, while Annie was small, she was terrific, and it's a well known fact that small things can do the worst damage. For instance, a guy gets killed the other day with a lead slug no bigger than your fingernail,

Veteran mystery writer Lawrence Treat, author of B AS IN BANSHEE, T AS IN TRAPPED, D AS IN DEAD, *etc., introduces us here to cab driver Terry McClane, an unusual addition to the ranks of involuntary detectives, one who would chase a deadbeat through a rain of bullets—should it ever be necessary.*

and Terry's last flat comes from a half-inch tack. Which proves the point.

So Terry had told her he could save as much as the next man, and he had his bank book in his pocket right now and it showed he was putting away twenty a week. What it didn't show was that he'd borrowed most of this week's twenty.

But that was on account of this lousy weather. Crisp and cool and bright, so that people walked and enjoyed it. Whereas Terry was a son of rain, when the crowds fought for cabs and the meter clicked off nickels, and the tips came fat and fast.

The thought of Annie made him gun the cab, but then he slowed to a sedate crawl. The big limousine behind kept crowding him and pumping its horn. Terry reacted by taking his foot off the gas and hogging the center of the street. Guys like that had to learn, and Terry might as well teach 'em. Besides, this was the corner where Officer Pat Donovan, of the motorcycle squad, hung out. And Pat was Annie's brother.

Terry's strong, full lips tightened as he noticed the motorcycle propped against the curb, near the corner. The green traffic light blinked out, but Terry stepped on the gas and shot forward. He could make it easy.

Then he saw Pat and changed his mind. He jammed down on the brakes, and the cab stopped like a toy smacking a piece of furniture. Stopped, and then lurched forward as the big limousine slapped bumpers.

Terry leapt out and glared at the five-thousand-buck limousine, brand new and polished like a mirror.

"Listen, your majesty," he yelled. "Don't you see the red light? Don't you see me stick out my hand? So what's the matter—bum brakes or something?"

The chauffeur gaped. No damage was done and Terry hadn't signaled, and here Terry was the guy that got sore. The chauffeur just sat there in his uniform, with his mouth open and no words even invented to express his feelings.

Then big Pat Donovan stepped over and towered above Terry. "So it's you again," said Pat. "What's the trouble this time?"

Terry stared at the guy that fate was going to wish on him for a brother-in-law. "I stop for a red light, like you're supposed to, and I get socked from behind. What do you want me to do? Get out and learn the guy how to drive?"

"I saw you," snapped Pat. "Started to jump a light, and then you spotted me and you stopped dead."

"From fright?" said Terry. "So now you want to give me a

ticket for having good brakes. But you wouldn't be hanging around that dame in the coffee joint when you're supposed to be on duty, wouldja?"

"Get going," said Pat tersely, "before I slap you down so hard you leave your profile on the sidewalk."

"You and who else?" Terry asked cheerfully, and climbed into his cab. Cops had it soft. A steady job, the dough coming in regular, and the city fixing things up to take care of their old age. A big giraffe like Pat ought to drive a hack a couple of days and learn the facts of life.

Terry spat and went on his way. Pat had been bringing his friends around, for Annie to look over. And what a bunch of palookahs. They either had just got promotions or been assigned to the detective force or had citations and their names in the paper. Silver spoons in their mouths, every one of 'em. Worked easy hours and had long vacations. One of them might be with her, right now.

Terry swung right and shot down the next street. Five minutes later he pulled up in front of the Donovan apartment, and his heart did a flip-flop at the sight of Annie. Her clear young face shone with the brightness of a new hack, and her body, slim and lithe, flowed in streamlined curves. Her costume was a two-tone job, orange and brown.

For two, long seconds Terry admired, without speaking. Then he said, "Going somewhere?"

"To my aunt's, uptown."

"To have your picture took?"

She smiled serenely, enjoying her power. "One of Pat's friends wants to call for me and drive me home."

"Them fancy Dans, wasting their dough on cars," said Terry. "Me, I put mine in the bank." He took the evidence out of his pocket and handed it to her. "See?"

She glanced at the entry. "Terry, I'm proud of you. I never really thought—" Her eyes grew bright, like the reflection of pavement on a late, wet night.

"I had a good week," said Terry modestly. "Look, Annie —hop in and I'll take you uptown."

"You can't. If they saw you with the meter down—"

Terry looked shocked. "Meter down? With you?" He flipped it and swung the door open. "I got quite a tip this morning. Guy was tight, and I took him upstairs."

Annie hesitated at the extravagance. Then, for reasons of her own, she stepped into the cab.

"What you rate," said Terry, "is a limousine and a private

chauffeur, like the one that bumped into me." He got behind the wheel and started. "If you move a little to the left," he remarked, squinting, "I can get a good look at you in the mirror."

"You're supposed to watch the traffic," she said.

Terry snorted. "I been hacking eight years, and I could drive with my eyes closed and never nick a fender." He waited for her to move over, and then he said, "About this guy who wants to call for you—you know what they say about cops, don't you? It takes a crook to nab a crook. I wouldn't trust 'em. Not a one."

"How about Pat?"

"Pat?" said Terry. He was an honest guy; he didn't like to lie straight out. "Yeah," he said, no longer looking in the mirror, "Pat."

From force of habit, he glanced at the hotel on the other side of the street. Three cabs were waiting on the feed line, and the drivers were playing pinochle. It was going to be a long game, too.

Terry made a sour face, and then he spotted the guy going through the revolving door. Terry reacted like he'd been hit. He stopped short, turned his cab squarely across traffic and yelled out, "Hey, palookah!"

Rubber squealed and a couple of bumpers tangled somewhere and all the horns on the block tooted. Terry was unaffected. His high inquisitive nose poked over the door and his blue eyes measured the speed of an approaching sedan. He lurched across its path and messed up most of the traffic that was still moving, but he made that space in front of the hotel.

He explained briefly to Annie. "That guy, he owes me some dough."

The doorman strode over to protest as Terry parked double.

"Can't stay here," snapped the doorman. He was ten or fifteen feet tall and he had more brass buttons than Pat Donovan.

"Yeah?" chirped Terry, and his blue eyes streaked with dark anger. "I don't wanna park, Colonel. I wanna know who that palookah is that just went in. You spoke to him—what's his name?"

"Move on, buddy. You're blocking the entrance."

"No kidding!" Terry jeered, and rubbed his nose. "That big guy—you know who."

He hopped out of his cab. He was short, stocky, with thick arms and a solid way of planting his feet on the ground. "You're a bunch of noise," he declared cheerily, "and I never knocked over a guy as tall as you. I'll find out, inside."

The doorman started to object and then glimpsed the wild, happy light in Terry's eyes, and

the fists clenched like a pair of bowling balls. There was something about Terry that reminded you of a horde of fiery Celts, charging with battle-axes and a great love of slaughter. Discreetly the doorman stepped aside while Terry marched into the hotel. To his surprise, he saw that Annie had followed him in.

A bank of three elevators faced the door, and Terry collared an operator. "Big guy with a blue suit and a coat over his arm—where'd he go?"

"What do you want to know for?"

"For five thirty-five!" Terry bellowed. "Four days ago he flags me on Sixtieth Street, Brooklyn. I drive him clear to Manhattan and he tells me to wait a minute in front of a house. When I get tired of waiting, I go in and find he's slipped out the back. Five thirty-five, and I got to pay it out of my own pocket. I just seen him walk in here."

"You sure it's the same guy?"

"Listen," said Terry. "I can lip-read a guy two blocks off and round a corner, and I seen this guy say, 'Ha-ha, taxi.' Am I sure? Say, trying to kid me?"

"Against the rules to let you up. But if you promise you won't make any trouble—"

The elevator man shrugged and winked his left eye. Terry turned to Annie. "You wait here," he said, and stepped into the elevator. The operator slammed the door and started up.

"Custer," he said. "Twelve-oh-seven."

"Thanks," said Terry.

1207 was at the end of an L-shaped corridor. Terry had just rounded the angle of the hall when the door swung open. A big man in a blue suit stepped out. He had coarse, yellow teeth showing between thin, bared lips, and his small eyes were set deep under his forehead. At sight of Terry he stopped and jerked his head towards the apartment. A shadow in brown froze in the doorway, waiting.

"I been looking for you," said Terry.

The big man stiffened. "Yeah?" he said, very quietly. "Who the hell are you?"

Terry felt the danger and went tense as stretched rubber, but his voice blared out. "Me? I drive a hack. Drove you all over town last week."

"Never saw you before," came that strangely quiet tone.

"Lay off that. You hung up five thirty-five on the meter and then gave me the go-by."

"Got your cab downstairs?"

"So," roared Terry, "I'm here to collect."

"Scram," said the big man softly. "I don't know you."

Terry's lips parted and he took two long steps forward,

with his fists clenched and his body set to bang into the target. The man in blue muttered through the corner of his mouth.

Terry's arm curled and his fist aimed for the crooked, yellow teeth.

The big man ducked. Terry tried to follow through, saw the brownish mass of the other man streak forward, saw an arm leap with the metal flash of a gun and felt a blow smash down on his head like the pound of a mallet.

The corridor rose and smacked him. The row of doors spun crazily and exploded in a roar of sparks. Terry tried to separate the twin blurs of the brown and the blue suits. They merged dimly, then swayed apart and vanished.

Terry fought to his feet. He thought he saw the muzzle of a gun levelled at him, but the blotch wouldn't stay steady. He tried to focus his eyes and find a point to swing at. Everything reeled, and he uncoiled a long, looping right that fanned the air and swung him off balance. He collapsed on the patterned carpet and never knew how close to death he'd come. The man in brown relaxed his trigger finger, poked Terry with a toe and pocketed the weapon. Terry didn't even hear the footsteps of the two men pad the length of the hallway.

When he came to, the corridor was deserted. His head was light as a balloon, and he rubbed it to block off the singing in his ear. His hand came away wet and sticky with blood.

"Five thirty-five!" he muttered. "And the guy got away!"

He stumbled to his feet and propped one hand against the wall to keep from falling. With shuffling, uncertain steps he reeled to the turn of the hall.

He stood there a minute, wiped the side of his head with a handkerchief. The nausea ebbed from his stomach and he walked back to 1207 without support. There was a name in the brass slot to the right of the door. George Morrow Custer. A hell of a name.

Terry tried the knob, just in case. The door was locked. He thought of Annie downstairs and he thought how he could report the whole business to the cops.

The idea made him sick. Ask the cops to do him a favor? Waste time talking to some jerk who wrote things down on a piece of paper? Not Terry. Pat would kid the pants off him and Annie would wonder why he couldn't handle his own wars. Well, at least Terry knew where the guy lived. Next time, Terry would get his dough.

Suddenly he caught a faint sound from inside the room. It was a low moan, followed by a

thump. Terry put his finger on the bell and rang. Then, anxiously, he waited.

He heard slow, dragging noises. They came irregularly, punctuated by gasps. Terry slapped his hand on the knob and rattled it. A thick voice rumbled vaguely.

"Snap it up," said Terry, "before you go and die on me."

There was a short silence, then a light, lifeless scratching on the door. It slid open a crack and Terry grabbed the knob and pushed.

A man on his knees was jerked backwards. He collapsed sideways, with his dark, clotted head resting on one elbow. His collar was ripped and his coat hung in shreds. Blood trickled from a cut on his scalp and parted in two thin streams over his puffed eye. His nose was a welter of red that dripped and stained his clothes, and his mustache was like an old paint brush that needed cleaning.

"Well," said Terry. "What happened?"

The injured man groaned. Terry kicked the door shut, then lifted the guy and carried him into a room that was fixed up fancy, like in the movies. Terry dumped him on a couch and walked into the bathroom. It had green tile walls, chromium fixtures and a low tub you could fall right into if you weren't looking.

Terry washed himself off. Then he doused a towel in cold water and brought it back to dab the guy's face. He revived quickly, but his brown eyes were still scared and beaten.

"That big palooka in the blue suit," said Terry. "He do this?"

"Ritchie?"

"Thought his name was Custer, like it says on the door."

"I'm Custer."

"Then Ritchie's the boy I want. You mean he don't live here? He ain't coming back?"

"Hope not."

"Say," said Terry in amazement. "He done this and you don't want to get back at him?"

"Two of 'em done it," mumbled Custer in a dazed voice. "Ritchie and Pearl."

"Well, you're no cripple. You still got your arms and legs."

The guy stared at Terry to see if he meant it, but there was nothing undecided about Terry. Custer murmured, "Some whiskey over there, in the cabinet. Give me a stiff one."

"Sure," grinned Terry. "Now you're talking." He filled a small glass and handed it to Custer.

"How about yourself?" asked Custer.

"Never touch it. Besides, I gotta wipe up the floor with this Ritchie guy first."

Custer sat up to gulp his drink. "What do you want with Ritchie?"

"Five thirty-five. Four days ago he rode my cab and hung up five thirty-five on the meter that he didn't pay. I come after it."

Custer stared at the stocky figure that seemed a little higher than it was wide. "If I were you," he advised, "I'd forget about a little chicken feed like that. Ritchie's a tough baby. Liable to pay off in lead."

"No good to me. I want bills. And when I go after something, I get it. What'd he beat you up for?"

"Never mind that."

"He slugged me, too, out in the hall. Him and this other mozark."

"Pearl. What did they do that for?"

"Got me stumped. Listen, mister, we both got plenty against him. How about ganging up on him together?"

"Are you that dumb?" said Custer.

"Business," answered Terry, "is business, and I do my own collecting."

Custer grunted and rubbed his swollen nose. "Stay away from Ritchie and Pearl," he said. "They'll kill you."

"Who, me?" said Terry, with forced bravado. "They wouldn't take the trouble. Now look—I told you my angle. What's yours? What were they after?"

"You really want to know?" said Custer. He thought it over. "Ever hear of the Blue Goose Inn?"

"Sure. I took a fare up there, once. Kind of a classy joint."

"Ritchie owns it. Nightclub downstairs and gambling rooms upstairs, if they know you. I was there a week ago. Ritchie fed me drinks, and I tanked up like a country hick. Lost all I had and a little more. Ritchie said he'd call it square if I signed over my interest in the Club Herman. He's been after it a long time."

"You own it?"

"Part interest. In six months I could pay off what I owe, but Ritchie won't wait."

"Hell with him," said Terry simply. "If you haven't the coin, he's got to wait."

Custer's puffed lips parted. "Yeah? That's what Harris thought."

"Who's Harris?"

Custer looked surprised. "Don't you read the papers? Harris had his name all over them. He owed Ritchie five grand, but he couldn't raise the dough and so he tried to hide out. Four days ago they found him in a rooming house out in Brooklyn, with a bullet in his gut. Ritchie did it. Said he'd do the same to me."

"Why tell me? I thought one of the reasons you got beat up was so you wouldn't shoot your mouth off."

"I'm not saying a thing the

wise boys don't know. Cops know it, too, but they can't prove a thing."

"Where'd it happen?"

"Out on Sixty-first Street."

"Say, I picked him up on Sixtieth that evening. Maybe—"

"Forget it. You didn't see him come out of the house, did you? He'll have an alibi; he'll prove he was doing something else. Ritchie, he's smart."

"He wasn't so smart when he gypped me."

"I guess he couldn't help himself. You see, somebody in the house heard that shot and came running up the stairs. Ritchie stopped him by chucking loose bills down the stairs. The trick worked. The guy picked up a few hundred bucks, and he never did see Ritchie. Went out the back without being seen. When he got in your cab, he probably didn't have a bill left."

"But why didn't he fork up just now, when I asked him?"

"I told you. Why would he take chances, when paying you would place him near the murder scene? And with a one-grand reward out, he's got to watch his step."

"One grand?" Terry said excitedly. "Look, pal—tell me everything you know about this Harris business. What the papers said and what you heard. Everything, see?"

"There isn't much. Ritchie was wearing brown gloves and didn't leave any prints. He ditched the gun there in the room, but they can't trace it. Besides, Ritchie wasn't the only one with a reason for croaking Harris."

"How do they know about the gloves?"

"Guy who chased him said so. Now if they had the gloves, they could tell whether one of them fired a gun. Some of the powder gases get shot back, and they'd test the gloves for it. If they could prove it was his, which isn't likely."

"Huh?" said Terry. He thought about the brown chamois glove, right hand, which he'd found in his cab the night of the murder. Somebody'd lost it; it must have slipped down behind the rear seat, where Terry always looked in case somebody'd dropped some change.

Terry had kept the glove, expecting to rip it apart and use it for a polishing cloth. It was under his seat now.

"Huh?" he said. "You mean if I could prove I picked up this Ritchie and that he dropped a glove in my cab, that then I could get married?"

"How does the marriage come in?"

"The reward, dope. With one grand in the bank, I'd be irresistible."

Custer managed a kind of

lop-sided smile. "I don't feel so good," he said.

"Sleep it off, pal. Me, I'm going to see Ritchie, and collect."

"Don't," said Custer, and closed his eyes wearily.

Terry dropped a hand on Custer's shoulder. "Well, I better get going. Annie's waiting downstairs; I don't want to keep her."

But the thought of a thousand dollars brought a grin to Terry's face. The grin stayed with him for the ride down in the elevator and as far as the revolving door to the street. There, he saw Pat Donovan's motorcycle, and Pat and Annie standing in front of the cab.

They both spoke to Terry at the same time. Pat said, "Double parking," and Annie said, "Terry, what took so long? What happened?"

Terry answered Annie. "Guy got away, and I met a friend."

"I know he got away," said Annie. "He came out with another man and they went straight to the cab and opened the door and started looking for something. Then I yelled, and I scared them away."

"Thanks," said Terry.

Pat said again, "Double parking," and reached for his summons pad.

Terry exploded. "Look," he said, "I spot this guy who rang up five thirty-five on the meter and then ducked out on me. So I got to work fast, to catch up to him. What am I supposed to do with the cab? Take it upstairs with me?"

"You got the whole block tangled up. That's all I'm interested in."

"Yeah," said Terry. "Now let me give you a little advice, Pat. You know me; you know my cab. You can give me that ticket any time you want."

"No time like now," said Pat.

"There's a guy up in 1207," said Terry. "Name of Custer. You can remember all that, can't you?"

"What are you driving at?" Pat demanded angrily.

"Go on up and see," said Terry. "Fast. Because you'll look pretty sick if you waste your time on a parking ticket."

Pat said, "You little—" Then he wheeled and strode into the hotel, lumbering like a one-man tank.

Annie said anxiously, "Terry, something happened."

"Nothing much. But I got a little business to attend to. You don't mind if I drop you off at the subway, do you?"

Annie's eyes narrowed, and her jaw set obstinately. "I certainly do mind."

"The thing is, I got a regular fare to pick up around now."

Annie stepped into the rear of the taxi. "Terence McClane, I think you're lying. And noth-

ing in the world can make me get out of this cab."

Terry made a final attempt. "Annie, that meter—it's money right out of my pocket."

"You can draw it from the bank," she said placidly. "Money isn't the most important thing in the world."

"Yeah," said Terry miserably. He didn't want Annie to get mixed up in this. And guys like Ritchie weren't Terry's speed, either. But somehow, what with all those friends of Pat's coming around, Terry couldn't let Annie get the idea that cops were any good. First thing he knew, he might lose her.

Annie said, "That man in 1207. Why did you send Pat there?"

"To get rid of him. Later on, he may change his mind about that ticket."

"A Donovan never changes, once he's made up his mind," said Annie. And then added slowly, "Or hers."

He liked the way she said that, and he told himself that Annie meant luck. And even if the sun was still shining, the day held promise.

The Blue Goose Inn was a broad, low structure with striped awnings. It was located just outside the city limits, and Terry pulled up in the big, gravel parking area, cut the motor and turned the meter down.

"Wait here," he said. "I'll be out in a little while."

"What are you going to do?"

He bent low over the driver's seat and took out the glove. He tried to slip the jack-handle under his windbreaker without Annie noticing, but she caught the flash of it.

"Terry, what's that?"

"Just in case," he said. "You wouldn't want me to go unarmed, would you?"

"Terry, I'm going with you."

"Look, Annie—you stay out here and watch the cab. I just want to collect my five thirty-five. It's peanuts for them; they'll pay up to get rid of me. And Annie—promise not to go inside."

Her eyes met his, and then turned away. "I promise," she said.

Terry walked off, his squat figure bowling towards the canopied entrance, and his shoes crunching gravel. He wished he had the nerve to quit. He remembered what Pearl had done to him earlier, and what Pearl and Ritchie had done to Custer. A part of Terry's mind kept telling himself he was a dope and should have called in the cops. But what could Terry show them? A glove that he thought belonged to Ritchie? Ritchie would say no, he never saw it before. And then what?

But Terry was an obstinate guy. He had dough coming to

him, and he was going to get it.

Inside, a waiter who was moving chairs around the empty dining room looked up and saw Terry. "Hey," he called to Terry. "What do you want? Place is closed."

"Look," said Terry. "You just tell Ritchie somebody's here to collect on a taxi meter. He'll know."

The waiter crossed the room and went through a door. When he came back he said, "Mr. Ritchie'll see you in there. Second door."

"Sure," chirped Terry. "I told you so?"

He went to the rear and found himself in a small corridor. A second door seemed to open all by itself, and Terry stepped through. Ritchie was there.

He was sitting at a desk. Heavy curtains screened the windows, and a lamp splashed a yellow puddle of light on the surface of the desk. Terry heard the door click shut behind him. Ritchie stared without speaking, in a tense, menacing way. His lips curled over the curve of his teeth.

"I don't know why you ducked me back at the hotel," Terry began cautiously, "but I came for that dough."

"You're a liar," said Ritchie.

"I've beaned guys for less than that," declared Terry. "But we'll skip that. The point is—fork up. You won't go without a meal on account of five thirty-five."

"You don't want it."

"No? Think I'm doing this for the fun of it?"

"I know what you're after. If you just wanted some cab fare, you'd call a cop. So—how much do you want?"

"What the meter says. That's what's coming to me."

"My friend, you're asking for it!"

The desk drawer slid open, and Terry was looking at the muzzle of a gun. He said, "Geez! Does five bucks mean that much to you?"

"I'd croak *you* for the pleasure of it."

Terry gulped. Ritchie couldn't mean it. Not here, in a room off the main dining room, with a waiter outside and Annie practically within hearing distance.

"You fire that," said Terry, "and you're sunk. Somebody hears the shot, the cops come in, and you're through."

"Nobody hears what goes on here. Soundproofed."

Terry gulped. Ritchie's voice went on, quietly. "Come on, punk—let's have it. *The glove!*"

Terry didn't try to bluff. He was glad he'd brought the glove; it was going to save his life. He'd give it up, and Ritchie would let him go.

Terry put the glove on the desk. Ritchie picked it up and

put it in the back of the drawer, along with the other glove. "Thanks," he said.

Terry drew a deep breath. "Well, I guess that's that."

Ritchie shook his head. "I think Pearl wants to see you. I'm pretty sure he does. Because I don't think I want you to walk out of here alone. I really don't think so."

Terry compressed his lips. He wondered about Annie. Ritchie must have seen her outside. He must know that if Terry didn't come out pretty soon, she'd guess there was trouble.

Ritchie picked up Terry's thought and completed it. "We won't do anything to your girl, if you come quietly," said Ritchie. "It will be one of those things. You came in, and nobody knows what happened to you or where you went. Nobody knows why you left your cab out there, nobody can find you. Nobody at all."

Terry said, conversationally, "She's a nice kid. Her brother's a cop. All her friends are cops; the whole force runs errands for her. They'll be down on your neck."

"Cops don't bother me," said Ritchie. "I know my rights. I know all about warrants and habeas corpus and the law of arrest. Cops are a joke."

"Yeah," said Terry. "They're funny, huh?"

Then somebody knocked on the door, and Ritchie pushed a button and the door swung open. Terry heard a voice roar from outside. "A little sawed-off mick with no brains and a tongue like an ack-ack battery—I know damn well he's in there. Annie said so."

Terry let out a yell. "Pat!" he cried. "Pat!"

The door opened all the way and Pat stood there straddle-legged, with his mouth open and his hand dipping down to his holster. Pearl was a step or two behind him.

"Terry," Pat said, "my sister wants you should come outside, so you can drive her home."

Terry nodded. "Sure. Only first, you better arrest this guy for the Harris murder."

Ritchie didn't bat an eye. He merely said, "That's a pretty wild statement. You wouldn't have any proof, would you?"

"The glove," said Terry. "Your glove there, in the drawer. That's the proof."

Ritchie, still smiling, slid the drawer partly open. "What glove?" he said. "I don't see any glove."

Terry realized how Ritchie was handling this. Let Terry go. Pat had no right to search, and by the time he'd gotten a warrant or gone through the right forms, there wouldn't be any glove.

It seemed to Terry like the time to start some action.

He started it. He yelled, "Pat—watch out for Pearl!" Simultaneously Terry brandished the jack-handle. Ritchie whipped out the gun, and Terry banged down on Ritchie's wrist. The gun fired wildly, and Pat was shooting at something and Terry slammed the jack-handle on Ritchie, and then ducked for safety. He saw Ritchie slump forward and clutch at the desk. Ritchie couldn't hold on. He sagged, slow motion effect, and the gun dropped from his fingers and hit the floor a foot away from Terry. He picked it up.

Pat shouted, "You crackbrained little runt—where in hell are you?"

Terry realized he was hiding behind a chair. Cautiously, he poked his head over the top of it. Pearl was lying flat, and Pat was brandishing his revolver and looking around for somebody else to mow down.

"Where in hell do you think I am?" Terry jeered. "In the middle of the room with all them bullets flying, and you such a lousy shot? Geez—I got some sense left!"

"Sense!" bellowed Pat. "If that guy Custer hadn't sent me here—"

"Sure, he sent you," Terry snapped. "That's why I told you to go up there. I figured he'd send you here and I'd have about five minutes to get things settled. And instead, you horse around somewhere, and I almost got killed. What took you so long? You run out of gas, or stop off for a hamburger?"

"Don't give me that," muttered Pat.

Terry shrugged. "Look, Pat," he said. "When they ask about the reward money, give 'em my name and address and tell 'em to send it to the both of us."

"Us?" said Pat, grinning. "You and me?"

Terry disillusioned him fast. "Us," Terry said. "Me and Annie."

Slowly, the grin faded from Pat's face. He took a familiar black pad from his pocket and began writing. "First things first," he said grimly. "Double parking. Remember?"

"Listen, you big jerk—you can't do that to your brother-in-law."

"Can't I, though!" said Pat. Then, as Terry bent down over Ritchie's form and picked up the wallet, Pat yelled, "Hey, put that down. What do you think you're doing?"

"Taking what's mine," Terry said placidly, counting out the money. "Exactly five thirty-five, cash. For me and Annie, tonight."

count of ten

by . . . Barry Perowne

When the usherette picked up the card she screamed and fainted. The word on the card was not RESERVED. It was DEATH.

THE unanimity with which passersby turned their heads to look after the tall man, as he strode vigorously along the Avenue Kleber, attracted the slightly protuberant eye of Gendarme Goubillon.

Hooking his thumbs in his belt, the stout agent of police paused in the shade of a tree to observe unobtrusively what amounted to a discreet commotion.

This was an aristocratic quarter of Paris, and now, at four o'clock of an August afternoon, a mellow sunshine gilded the massive and elegant architecture, polished the disdainful windows of dealers in *objets d'art*, and glorified the frocks of ladies of fashion.

Crass curiosity was uncommon in surroundings of such decorum, yet all eyes turned to follow the tall man.

At a loss to construe the expression on the faces of the onlookers, Goubillon twisted thoughtfully the skewers of his waxed mustache as he watched the approach of the cynosure of interest.

The great Barry Perowne, well known for his Raffles stories, has woven an exciting tale around the problems facing the Paris Police when the strange Count Vesper was accused of murder. Inspector Augereau swore that if Vesper was a murderer, he had a rendezvous with the guillotine which would be kept.

Well over six feet in height, the man was dressed immaculately in striped trousers, black jacket, double-breasted, gray waistcoat, black bowler precisely slanted. He carried an ebony-knobbed cane and pigskin gloves; a cordless monocle glittered in his right eye. Apparently the middle forties, he was cleanshaven, with a square, hard, bone-white face and a gargoyle mouth.

His bearing was one of almost tigerish force and arrogance; yet though he would have been anywhere a salient figure, the attention he attracted was abnormal. And he himself seemed, now, to become aware of the looks and whispers. His black brows drew together; his eyes, lizard-gray in deep, bony sockets, darted suspicious, quick, sidelong glances. His stride lengthened. He passed Goubillon—and at once there smote like a thunderclap upon the gendarme the reason for the sensation.

High up on the man's powerful shoulders, a square of white cardboard was clipped to the collar of his jacket. In black, crude capitals, in French, there glared from the cardboard four stark words:

I AM A MURDERER

For a moment, the gendarme stood staring in stupefaction. Then, with a glance at the people gaping and turning round on the pavement, he hastened to overtake the provocatively labeled stranger.

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

Seemingly unaware of the summons, the tall man pressed on. His tiger stride outpaced the gendarme, who was compelled to trot, angrily elbowing aside the people who, turning to gape, blundered into his way. Boulevardiers toying with their refreshments under a *café* awning rose as one and jostled out on to the pavement to observe the progress of the pursuit.

"Monsieur!" panted Goubillon.

He reached out a hand to the man's shoulder, and the man wheeled instantly, striking the hand aside, his tone venomous.

"What's the meaning of this? You address *me*? What do you want?"

Goubillon, red-necked and ruffled, drew in his breath. "An explanation," he said firmly.

"Of what?"

"Of this!" Reaching swiftly over the tall man's shoulder, Goubillon jerked the card free and clapped it front first to his midriff. "Of this card," he said sternly, tapping it.

The tall man's eyes were suspicious as a snake's. He raised his hand towards his neck, said harshly, "What are you talking about?"

"About the disturbance you've been creating," said Goubillon.

"See for yourself!" He jerked the prongs of his mustache at the spectators closing in.

"What fantastic nonsense is this?" the tall man said, with bitter anger. "I wearing that card? Show me!"

He snatched it. He looked at the legend. And before the prominent, shrewd eyes of the gendarme, the man's bone-white, bloodless face went ashen, even his wide, down-curving, gargoyle mouth paled. He ripped the card across and across, hurled the pieces to the pavement.

"Some moron's notion of a joke!" he said savagely. But the shock and terror that for a flash had convulsed that hideous face, as though guilt itself had knocked with a gaunt knuckle on the man's heart, convinced the gendarme that behind this strange labeling was not levity but a grim intent.

Blandly, to cover the keen excitement he now felt, Goubillon said, "Without doubt, Monsieur, a jest. Nevertheless—"

He stooped to harvest the scattered fragments.

"What 'nevertheless' is there?" the tall man demanded. "A cretin's humor—"

Goubillon straightened, flushed but adamant.

"Nevertheless," he said, "such a jester would seem to be malicious—perhaps even, it could be, a subject for an alienist. Monsieur will agree that, with that type there, one thing is liable to lead to another. It might therefore be in the public interest for Monsieur to furnish such information as he thinks might help to identify this morbid japer. To save Monsieur embarrassment before idle people," added Goubillon, raising his voice to a loud, offensive note for the benefit of the onlookers. "If he would just step round to the station—it is no distance—"

He could see the fury and reluctance in the tall man's face; but the man had no alternative. He shrugged.

"*Merci, M*onsieur," said Goubillon.

It was an expensively embossed visiting-card which the tall man slapped down impatiently on the desk of Inspector Augereau at the police station in the Rue de la Pompe.

The name on the card was Count Jules Vesper; the address was one in the nearby Rue du Général Langlois.

Count Vesper declared himself totally unable to guess who might have attached the placard to his back, or how and when it had been done.

"You hardly imagine," he said, with a truculent sneer, "that the words on the card have any significant application to myself?"

"Ah, that, tchah-tchah-tchah," said Inspector Augereau diplo-

matically. He stroked his jaw. He was a man with a leathery, furrowed face, a shock of gray hair, and blue eyes of which the left invariably grew bloodshot in moments of emotion. "May I ask," he went on, "where you had come from at the time the gendarme drew your attention to this—" he indicated the cardboard legend which he had pieced together on his desk—"this outrage?"

"From the Salle Kleber," said Count Vesper.

So august was the repute of this famous card club that Gendarme Goubillon barely resisted a genuflection at the mention of it.

"You are a member?" said Augereau.

"Of long standing," replied Count Vesper.

"And you had just left the club premises?" said Augereau. "So that it might have been there that the card was affixed to your coat?"

"That could be, of course," the Count said impatiently. "In any event, the affair is obviously the would-be witty conception of some decadent and crapulous delinquent to whom I'm well capable of administering reproof if I identify him. The concern, surely is mine. You, no doubt—" he contemptuously waved a cigarette in an ivory holder at the tables stacked with dusty, pink-taped dossiers — "are preoccupied with graver matters. I've accommodated your *flic* by coming here. Now, I'll bid you good day."

He stalked out, slamming the door. Goubillon looked with expectation at his superior. The inspector's left eye was growing visibly bloodshot. He snatched up the telephone.

"Clausel?" he barked. "There is a man on his way out whose face would adorn the towers of Notre Dame. Follow him. I want a full report of his movements over the next twenty-four hours."

He hung up. And Goubillon exclaimed, "You think, then—"

"I think you did sagely to bring him in," said Augereau. "Now, *mon brave,* if you would cover yourself further with glory, go to the Salle Kleber, buttonhole the Commissionaire on the door, find out if Count Vesper bore that stigma on his back when he left the club."

Goubillon departed, and Augereau sent for a fingerprint man.

"On the edge of my desk here," said Augereau, "you should find a good set of prints where one Count Vesper considerately rested his fingertips. Dust these over first, my good Bechtel, and let us have a look at them." He peered through a reading lens. "H'm-h'm! Now, your skilled attention to these pieces of cardboard. The enterprising

Goubillon's prints are on record in the file here. Ah, I have them. Now, by comparison, we eliminate. One, Goubillon. Again, Goubillon. Once more, Goubillon. *Ma foi,* the man is all digits! Aha, here is a Vesper. A distinctive ridging there, Bechtel. Another Vesper. A—h'm-h'm, a moment, a little moment. What have we here?" He peered intently through the lens. "A cuckoo in the nest, I fancy. What do you make of it?"

"A right index-finger," said Bechtel. "From the whorls and composites, a finger curiously mutilated—"

"I'll trouble you for a photograph, Bechtel," said the inspector, "photographs, also of the Vesper prints."

Goubillon returned to report that the commissionaire of the Salle Kleber had not been on the door when Count Vesper had left the club. No information could be obtained as to whether he then had had the card on his back.

"No, matter," said Augereau. "I go now to the Sureté, then to the Salle Kleber myself."

Neither Count Vesper's prints, nor the print of the maimed forefinger, proved to be on record at the Quai des Orfèvres. The Count was known there, however, and from Sureté information combined with information obtained from the secretary of the Salle Kleber, Augereau was able to sketch in a rough background to the man who had walked in the avenue with the avowal I AM A MURDERER on his back.

Vesper was the last of a noble but impoverished family. Three times he had brought home wealthy foreign brides to the magnificent but ruinous *chateau* which was all that survived of the Vesper estates, and three times he had been divorced on the grounds of mental cruelty.

His chief source of income seemed for years to have been the Salle Kleber. Cards were played for grave stakes in the club's lofty and somber chambers, and Count Vesper's consummate skill and crocodile impassivity were known to have been responsible for the financial collapse and social ignominy of more than one luckless gambler.

"Totally *dégonflé,* you understand," said the secretary.

"That! no doubt," replied Augereau, his left eye as red by now as a blood orange. "But has any of these unhappy plungers—has any of your members, past or present—a maimed forefinger or a hand in any manner mutilated?"

"None that I can recall," said the secretary, after reflection.

Vaguely sinister, on examination, proved Count Vesper's war record. He had worked for the clandestine intelligence services, had been captured by the enemy

and thrown into Fresnes prison. He had escaped and with a companion had set out to cross the Pyrenees into Spain. All along the way, undercover contacts had had record of their passage; but somehow in the mountain passes, Vesper had lost touch with his companion, whose fate remained unknown.

Back at the Rue de la Pompe, Augereau pondered.

What was the precise motive of the individual who had labeled Count Vesper a murderer? Who had done it? Was it a lover or kinsman of some woman he had treated evilly? Was it some gambler he had ruined and made desperate and vengeful? Could it be that the comrade who had vanished in the mountain passes still lived and had a score to settle?

"If Vesper *is* a murderer," said Augereau, "then he has a rendezvous with the guillotine, and I'll see he keeps it!"

His red eye glowed.

Within a cordon's throw of the police station where Inspector Augereau brooded was the Rue de Général Langlois. It was a *cul de sac*. On the left was a terrace of tall mansions with elaborate stone balconies and opulent, curved sun-blinds. On the right was a large garden reserved to the use of tenants and enclosed by a high stone wall.

Count Vesper's apartment was on the fourth floor of the most imposing of the mansions. His front windows overlooked the garden, his rear window an inner courtyard around which the house was built. An iron staircase spiralled up the walls of this courtyard.

Augereau's lieutenant, Jean Clausel, had ingratiated himself overnight with the *concierge* of the building. As a result, he had got himself installed in a flat, the tenant of which was away on holiday, that faced the rear of Count Vesper's across the courtyard.

Clausel had spent a tedious night at his post, but now things were looking up.

It was a radiant August morning and the first sign of life was the milkman's arrival. This purveyor clanked up the iron staircase with shrill-toned whistlings and deposited two bottles at the Count's kitchen door.

Presently the door opened.

Sheltered by the curtains of the window from which he watched, Clausel focused a pair of opera-glasses he had found in the apartment.

The man who took in the bottles was thin and tall. He wore his hair in an oiled fringe, and his eyes were set closely together in a long, narrow, blue-shaven, lugubrious face. He was in shirt-sleeves, with black trousers and a striped waistcoat.

From inquiries Clausel had made, he knew the man to be Count Vesper's valet and sole domestic, Gustave Sadoun.

Half an hour later, the valet reappeared in the act of parting the heavy brocade curtains of a wide window. Clausel's opera-glasses brought the room close; it was a bedroom, luxuriously appointed. Placing on a table near the window a breakfast tray bearing a napkin of *croissants* and a bulbous glass percolator, Gustave withdrew from the room.

The bed was out of Clausel's line of vision, but after a moment Count Vesper appeared, tightening the cord of a dragon-patterned silk robe. He stretched hugely, with a gargoyle yawn. His head was oddly flat on top; his hair, as he smoothed it back, had the black sheen of enamel.

Fitting a cigarette into a holder, he moved to a dressing-table, peered closely at his reflection in the triple mirrow, pulled down with a long, sensitive, cardsharper's forefinger the lower lid of each eye. Further to check this scrutiny, he picked up an ivory-backed hand-mirror.

He stood stockstill, in sudden rigor.

Then Clausel's opera-glasses brought the mirror close. Scrawled as though with lipstick across the glass was a single word:

A S S A S S I N

Vesper glanced quickly, almost furtively, over each shoulder in turn. Then, with a fierce movement he obliterated the word with the sleeve of his robe, and, wheeling round, came to the window. Screwing his monocle into his eye, he leaned from the window, looked with a kind of anxious speculation at the zig-zags of the iron staircase, then carefully examined the sill.

Stepping back, at last, he took up the percolator. His hand was not quite steady; and at some sound behind him, he turned so sharply that coffee deluged over the tray.

It was Gustave Sadoun who had startled him.

The valet stood lantern-jawed and grievous, holding in his hand a silver salver on which lay letters.

Count Vesper snatched them, shuffled them, tossed them back —all except one. This he opened and read. Juggle as he would with the opera-glasses, Clausel could get no glimpse of the writing on the paper.

Vesper looked finally at the valet.

Master and man exchanged a long, inscrutable regard. Then the valet extended a hand, clicked a lighter to flame. Vesper touched a corner of the note-paper to it. The paper flared, curled, blackened to a crisp of ash. Vesper dropped it into the salver. He turned and passed

into another room. His great shoulders stooped. It seemed to Clausel, as he reported presently to Inspector Augereau, that the man had aged before his eyes.

Augereau stared. "This word written on the mirror—the valet could be responsible."

Clausel shook his head. "There's perfect understanding between those two, inspector. Whatever the situation, Gustave is in Vesper's confidence; he knows the full inwardness of it."

"You had the iron stairs under observation all night," said Augereau. "You saw no prowler. You heard nothing. Yet this unknown must somehow have entered Vesper's apartment."

Augereau's left eye grew suffused. "Get me the fingerprints of the valet, Gustave Sadoun."

With the co-operation of the *concierge,* Clausel contrived to get these prints. They bore no resemblance to the print of the mutilated finger which interested Augereau.

Augereau assigned more men to the case. Reports streamed in.

While he was dining with a feminine companion at the Closerie des Lilas, Count Vesper's mask of reptile reticence was clawed suddenly from him, he was struck haggard and tremulous, by the inexplicable appearance of the word VENGEANCE scored across the menu.

That menu, spirited away to Inspector Augereau, yielded the prints of four fingers of a hand atrociously maimed.

Augereau thumped his desk. "Clausel, the issue emerges! 'Vengeance!' Count Vesper is, in fact, a murderer. This avenger, this man with a mutilated hand, is on his trail. But if he's a murderer, Clausel, no private vengeance must be allowed to cheat the guillotine of his neck. Count Vesper is *our* prey. This would-be avenger must be trapped. He must be made to tell *us* what he knows of the deeds of Count Vesper."

"Inspector," said Clausel, "this mutilation—" A young man with a thin, keen face, he looked up eagerly over the reading-lens he held. "Thumbscrews!"

"Comment?" Augereau snatched photographs and lens. He pored over the prints, his eye inflamed. "It could be," he muttered. "Yes, Clausel, you're right. Mutilation by thumbscrews—"

At that moment, the telephone shrilled.

Augereau snatched it up. He listened for some seconds, spoke curtly, clapped the instrument down on its hooks.

"That was Blanc," he said. "Count Vesper has just walked out of the Théâtre du Rond Point. You know they place cards on reserved seats. When the usherette leading Vesper to

his fauteuil picked up the card there, she screamed and fainted. The word on the card was not 'Reserved.' It was—'DEATH'!"

He looked at the black, photographed enlargements of the four mutilated fingerprints. They seemed to mock him. He felt something akin to an obsession to defeat the design of Count Vesper's elusive nemesis.

It was a battle of wits for the fate of Jules Vesper—a battle to decide whether the avenger should have him or the guillotine.

"I'll win this duel, Clausel," Augereau. vowed, "if it's the last thing I do."

Yet on the very next afternoon, while breaking the cellophane of a new pack of cards direct from the office of the secretary of the Salle Kleber, Vesper was seen, by a police agent now established in the club as a waiter, to hurl the pack suddenly from him.

His hands shook. He rose with difficulty from his chair. His face was livid. His lizard eyes, sunk deep under bony ridges, held a sightless stare of misery and dread.

"He's near the end of his tether," said Perroquet, the agent who brought the pack of cards to Augereau.

Augereau fanned the cards out over his desk. Every card in the pack was an ace of spades.

Augereau glared up with a vivid eye. "What has the secretary to say to this?"

"He can't account for it. He issued the pack direct from a locked drawer in his desk. I examined the drawer," said Perroquet. "There was no sign of tampering."

"What kind of a phantom do we deal with?" Augereau raged. "He enters Vesper's flat under Clausel's very nose—unseen. He walks into the Closerie des Lilas and scrawls on the menu at Vesper's table. Did he pose as a waiter? Impossible, we are told. What of the nearby diners? None was seen to approach Vesper's table. *Tonnerre!* And the Théâtre du Rond Point—how were the cards switched on the fauteuil? Blanc was present—he saw nothing. Now, this—this pack of cards! In the name of St. Denis, what are we dealing with? A ghost?"

He thumped his desk.

"No, my friends," he said. "Ghosts don't leave fingerprints. It's not fear of a ghost that's reduced Count Vesper in a few days from the arrogant to the abject—"

"I agree," Perroquet said. "His condition's real enough, beyond doubt. He's on the edge of collapse. He can't go on. Mark me, Inspector, he'll take his own life—"

"Suicide?" Augereau was startled. "Can that be the object of this elusive avenger?" He pon-

dazed. "But no. This is revenge. This ingenious, elusive, vindictive man with the tragically maimed hand—would he let Vesper choose his own way out? Deny himself the consummation of so refined a hatred—the last, lethal ecstasy of the *coup de grâce*? Never! He'll strike the final blow himself. If he's not to be cheated of his cherished consummation, he must strike soon. He must strike, probably, *tonight*!"

In the Rue du Général Langlois, a single bracket-lamp burned wanly on the high stone wall that truncated the *cul-de-sac*.

From just inside the door of the garden opposite, Inspector Augereau, with two men at his shoulder, peered obliquely down the *cul-de-sac*. With a hum and flash, an occasional car swept past along the Avenue Henri Martin.

Augereau was glancing anxiously, for the tenth time, at the luminous dial of his wristwatch when Clausel hissed, "Listen!"

Augereau heard a car slowing down. Lights swiveled round into the *cul-de-sac*. The car was a taxi. It pulled up outside the house opposite the door in the garden wall. The driver twisted back an arm to open the taxi door.

"Voilâ, monsieur," he said impatiently, as no one stepped out.

Augereau's hand was clamped hard on the butt of his automatic. He had a vision of Vesper sitting dead there in the taxi; but slowly, cautiously, a figure stepped out. It was Vesper, shoulders hunched under a greatcoat, felt hat pulled low over his eyes. He paid the driver, who let his taxi coast back down the slope before engaging his clutch.

The Count's right hand was deep in his pocket. Glancing continually from side to side, he mounted the wide steps to the door. It was of frosted glass and wrought-iron; a dim light burned behind it. He pressed a button. Waiting for the *concierge* to operate the door from the basement, Vesper seemed acutely conscious that he was silhouetted against the light. When the door clicked open, he thrust in incontinently. The door whirred shut.

Augereau stepped from the garden. Up the slope from the avenue came two figures, silently running. They were the men he had had as shadows on Vesper.

"Where's he been all evening?" whispered Augereau.

"At dinner in the Avenue Victor Hugo. Nothing happened."

"H-m-h'm," said Augereau. "Clausel, keep these two men with you. You others, you've been briefed; you know your posts. The rest are already in position. The flat's been check-

ed; there's no one there but Sadoun, the valet. Clausel, I shall be at the window from which you watched previously. One glimpse of a prowler, any of you—grab him and blow your whistle. Forward!"

He crossed the road, mounted the steps, pressed the button in a signal arranged with the *concierge*. The door whirred open. In the dim, marble-floored hall, the men distributed themselves to their posts. Two of the men mounted the stairs.

Augereau went through to the inner courtyard. From the foot of the spiral iron staircase, a shadow stepped.

"Blanc?" Augereau whispered. "Vesper's arrived. Don't take your eyes off these stairs for an instant. I shall be up at the window there."

With a key obtained from the *concierge,* the inspector opened a door across the courtyard. Using his flashlamp, he went up four flights of stairs, let himself into the vacant apartment. He had reconnoitered it earlier. Not using his torch now, he felt his way to the window. It was open. He leaned out. Just across the courtyard, chinks of light showed round the brocade curtains of Count Vesper's bedroom.

Augereau felt on his face the cool, wraithlike touch of the misting rain. He peered down through the rods of the iron staircase into the black well of the courtyard. All was still. The only light anywhere was that glimmer round the Count's curtains. What was he doing in that room? Sitting on his bed, gun in hand, his gargoyle mouth twitching, his lizard eyes darting at every faint creak of a floorboard, every hint of a breath stealthily drawn?

Augereau's left eye burned and winked as he drew in his head from the rain. There was no gap in his cordon. If the avenger came, he'd find himself in the meshes of the net. He'd be made to tell what he knew about Count Vesper; and if Vesper were, in fact, a murderer, he'd go to the guillotine.

Augereau groped behind him for a chair in which to settle himself for his vigil. His hand touched cloth. The cloth moved under his touch. He heard the faint creak of a floorboard, the hint of a breath stealthily drawn. He opened his mouth to shout and a pad of cloth, reeking sickly sweet, was rammed over his lips and nose, his head was ground back against a bony shoulder, his right wrist was gripped and twisted. He writhed. He mewed through the cloth. Even in that instant of spinning darkness, suffocating nausea, reeling senses, he was aware of the appalling mutilation of the powerful, warped fingers that gripped his wrist.

That was his last thought as

consciousness left him, his first when it returned.

He was lying on his back on the floor of the vacant flat. Clausel was on one knee beside him, a hand on his shoulder. Clausel's nostrils twitched.

"Chloroform!"

"That, yes," said Augereau weakly. His gorge heaved abortively as he dragged himself to a sitting posture. He stroked his right wrist; he still could feel there the clutch of crippled fingers. He ached and shivered. Daylight struck between the partly drawn curtains. Daylight! His left eye glared stark and sore. "*Mon Dieu,* what time is it?"

"Eight o'clock," said Clausel. "The milkman's been. I've made the rounds of the men. All was quiet in the night. Nothing was seen. Nothing was heard. Yet—" he stammered—"yet—I come to you for your orders, and find you—"

"Fools!" said Augereau. He staggered to his feet. "You blind, dumb fools," he said thickly, "'all was quiet in the night'! He *came,* I tell you—probably by some rear window in this part of the house. By immobilizing me, he made a gap in the cordon. He crept across to Vesper's apartment by the iron staircase. He struck. He returned by the iron staircase, passed my unconscious hulk here, and departed the way he came. He's defeated us, Clausel—'his elusive avenger.' Count Vesper is as surely a dead man as Bonaparte in his tomb. And you prate to me. 'All was quiet in the night'!"

He peered out across the courtyard. The brocade curtains of Count Vesper's bedroom were closed and blank, like those of a house that mourned.

Yet, at that instant, an agitation troubled the curtains. Hands gripped and parted them. The glum valet, his eyes close-set under his oiled fringe, opened the window. On a table nearby he had set a breakfast tray bearing a napkin of *croissants* and a bulbous glass percolator.

Without a glance at the bed, and clearly unaware as yet that an avenger had passed that way in the night, the valet moved decorously from the room.

Next second, Augereau's red eye started from his head. For into his range of vision moved the figure of Count Vesper himself.

The Count tightened the cord of his dragon-patterned silk robe, passed his hands over his hair, gleaming like black enamel. Fitting a cigarette into a holder, he moved to the dressing-table, peered closely at his reflection, pulling down the lower lid of each eye.

Screwing his monocle into his eye, he came to the table in the window. His wide, thin mouth

was smiling. His air was that of a man from whose mind some great weight, some crushing burden of fear, providentially had been lifted. He took up the percolator, poured coffee with a steady hand.

The valet came in again. Lantern-jawed and secretive, he stood holding in his hand a silver salver on which lay letters. Count Vesper took them up casually, shuffled through them, tossed them back.

He looked at Gustave Sadoun. The valet extended a hand, clicked a lighter to flame. Between master and man passed a long look of profound mutual comprehension. Then Count Vesper dipped his cigarette in the flame, and, with all his old, almost tigerish force and arrogance, passed into another room.

Augereau clapped the curtains together. "You saw, Clausel?"

"He's safe," said Clausel, bewildered.

"The Count, yes," said Augereau, his eye glowing. "*But what of the avenger?* He entered by the gap he made in the cordon. He could have been carried out by the same way. Who scored the knock-out in the night, Clausel? *Why is the smile on the face of the tiger?* Come, man, come!"

They were back in half an hour with a search warrant for the Count's apartment. Nothing of significance was found there. The peculiar persecution of Count Vesper came to an end with that night. No trace ever was discovered of the elusive avenger whose fingerprints, shockingly mutilated, remained unidentified in the *dossier Vesper.*

NEXT MONTH—

Peter Cheyney's OF PERFUME AND SUDDEN DEATH

Hal Ellson's DARK REFLECTIONS

Octavus Roy Cohen's THE FRAMEUP

F. van Wyck Mason's THE REPEATER

Michael Innes' THE DETECTIVE STORY

Hayden Howard's AMATEUR ASSASSIN

and Leslie Charteris' new Saint story, THE HAPPY SUICIDE

—in *your* THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

THE saint's RATINGS

Did I tell you about my Operation?

THE FIRST WRITER *or publisher who thought that some variation on the* "Operation Whatsit" *formula would make a catchy book title must have thought he was a pretty sharp fellow. If he had been less overcome with his own brilliance, he might have gone on to think that several other fellows might be just as sharp and have the same brainstorm. Only the* Cumulative Book Index *knows how many variations on that phrase have been worked since, but we have three in this month's crop (two of them even from the same publisher)—plus a couple of almost equally overworked* Assignments.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

○○○	Three haloes:	Outstanding.
○○	Two haloes:	Above average.
○	One halo:	Passable reading.
⋔	A pitchfork:	For the ashcan.

OPERATION INTRIGUE, by Walter Hermann (Avon, 25¢)

One of those very rare yarns of top-level secret service work which combines an original and exciting plot with effective plausibility, by the equally rare author who sounds as if he actually knew something about such operations. ○○○

OPERATION TOKYO, by Ted Middleton (Avon, 25¢)

Also seems to handle its background authentically, but although the characters are in uniform there are no spies to look for. Only loot. And much less suspense. ○

OPERATION—MURDER, by Lionel White (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Would have been more appropriately titled OPERATION TRAIN ROBBERY, but no doubt somebody thought the word Murder was more exciting. Of course a few guys do get murdered, but the excessive padding makes it quite unexciting after all. ○

ASSIGNMENT—MURDER, by Donald Hamilton (Dell, 25¢)

Extra-curricular problems and perils of an atomic scientist who is also a believably regular guy, told by a writer with an uncommon gift of getting personality into his characters and dimension into his narrative. ○○○

ASSIGNMENT—SUICIDE, by Edward S. Aarons (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Unpretentious and entirely unbelievable adventures of a CIAgent inside Russia. May appeal to incurable addicts of the cloak-and-Dagmar school. ○

the well-mannered monster

by . . . Stewart Sterling

The nice gentleman turned to gambling to provide the "brass" needed to finance his wenching and wining. And from gambling—

RUGELY is in Staffordshire, something like a hundred miles north of London, one of the quietly quaint towns you may have seen pictured on lithographs in the railway stations of England or the travel agencies of American cities. If you chance to visit Rugely, not far from the bustling county seat of Stafford and only a bit further from the famous sporting town of Derby, you may find it difficult to envision this agreeable village in the valley of the Trent as having been the scene of a comedy of terrors which made the bloodiest murders of the Borgias seem pallid performances indeed.

Exactly one hundred years ago, in 1856, Rugely was being featured in the newspapers of the day as the ravaging grounds of a gentleman who packed more varieties of homicide into fifteen frightful years than the Bard of Avon crammed into all his tragedies. His name was William Palmer; from the archives he would appear to have been a combination lecher, gambler, swindler and swaggerer in the grand manner.

There is a widespread illusion, quickly dispelled by Stewart Sterling, that murder was somehow more genteel in great-grandfather's day. The fact is ignored that the impulse to mayhem was with us, then as now, the only possible difference being that we've developed refinements on that aged impulse over the years.

He was not quite to the manor born, however — though the house in which he first saw the light in 1821 was almost impressive enough to have passed as a mansion. It stood in a small park sloping to the banks of the Trent, the glossy green of box hedges and the drapery of ivy cool against the warm red brick of the solid walls.

This house, built by Jonathan Palmer for his family of five sons and two daughters, was the setting for the first scene in the cavalcade of crimes which were eventually brought home to the youngest child, William. Two miles away on the main street of Rugely stood the Green Yew, an inn much fancied by the racing gentry *en route* to Derby; this was the stage for the villain's downfall in the last act.

William's father was a lumber dealer who acquired, in his fifty years, a competence sufficient to give goodly dowers to both daughters and excellent educations to five sons. One of the sons, Walter, the eldest, became a lumber merchant like his father and wealthy in his turn; of him, more later under the heading *fratricide*.

Another of William's brothers became an advocate; one was ordained by the Church of England; one went into grain dealings in Liverpool. Unhappily none of the four turned to the then comparatively new profession of insurance for otherwise the grisly career of William would likely enough have been foreshortened.

Of William's first dabbling into death-dealing draughts we have now no proof beyond damning circumstantial evidence in view of the succeeding horrors. But the logic that he used the waters of Lethe first upon his father is inescapable.

William at twenty-three had returned from medical school at Liverpool to become a surgeon, thus rounding out the well-established family—one lawyer, one minister, one doctor, one business man and one son following in the footsteps of the father. William, in his own way, was also copying Father Jonathan who had a reputation as a betting man; William became a "punner"—one who—in the parlance of the turf—wagered pounds where most of the Staffordshire gentry ventured only shillings.

Possibly he turned to gambling to provide the "brass" needed to finance his wenching and wining; at both he was shortly cutting a notable swath through that sleepy village. Rumors of payments to tarnished damsels began to be coupled with reports of his failure to make payments to gambling creditors. Still, William had no profitable practice and no funds in sight except his share in the

patrimony. He tried to borrow on this and failed. He attempted to induce his father to advance a sum against the hoped-for heritage; Jonathan refused. And suddenly the father died . . . hearty and hale at breakfast, grave-gray by nightfall. William received his share of the estate.

At that time, in 1844, whatever suspicions may have been whispered in the corridors and closets of the old brick house never were voiced beyond the little park on the river bank. True, William had been with his father at the time of the strange seizure, which was held to be a stomach convulsion—but who could really believe that a son would thus cruelly do in his own father, no matter how great the need for pounds, shillings and pence?

But two years later, when William married, the first whisperings began to creep out after darkfall. The handsome surgeon had swiftly run through the money his father had left him; his drinking and dallying were proceeding at a faster and more expensive pace. He made the acquaintance of Marian Brooks, the natural daughter of rich Colonel Brooks, reputed to be "knee-deep in rupees" after years in the East India service. In a month, Marian was Mrs. William Palmer; in two months more Colonel Brooks was mysteriously found dead at night outside his son-in-law's home . . . a home purchased with the English equivalent of rupees.

Tongues wagged then in Rugely pubs but the debonair William was so affable, so generous and above all such a splendid sportsman! Who could mistrust so well-mannered a gentleman?

To those who breathed natural suspicions on the calm Rugely air, some beneficiary of William's generosity would have been sure to scoff at the idea. Was it not a known fact that all the notable poisoners of history had been women? There would have been mention of Locusta, Lucretia Borgia and Tofana in Italy; Lavoisin, Lavigoreux and Catherine de Medici in France; even the Countess of Somerset of evil memory in England. Poison was a woman's weapon, not a man's way of murdering, if murder there had been. Which had by no means been proved.

If William noticed any difference in the atmosphere of his favorite taverns, any mutterings in the chimney corners or looks askance, he gave no sign of it.

He began to venture into the training and ownership of horse flesh as a counterpoint to his daily betting; he acquired a stable, began to breed racing animals. He was no luckier at this than in backing his judgment at the tracks. The need

of funds once more became pressing, but all the Colonel's funds had been put into a life-estate for the mother of his daughter; evidently he had not trusted William much. William was equal to this situation; he invited his mother-in-law to come to Rugely to live with him. She did; four days later she was taken by a mysterious "seizure" and died. William was loud in lamentations.

Her property passed into the hands of William's wife; for a period of six or seven years he had sufficient control over it to "go through it like oats from a rent sack," as the Staffordshire saying has it. During this time the couple had five children. On their account, according to William, he took out an insurance policy on his wife with the Globe Insurance Company and others for twenty-five thousand pounds . . . an enormous policy for that day and age.

The lady was in good sound health and seemed an excellent risk . . . from the vantage point of London. An ear cocked in Rugely might have caught the lingering echoes of those warning whispers . . . yet who so bold as publicly to doubt the successful and prosperous surgeon, the wealthy proprietor of Palmer's Stud?

It seems incredible, if not actually callous, to suggest wholesale infanticide . . . but the cold facts are that one after the other, during the next two years, the four oldest of the Palmer children died . . . of mysterious and undiagnosed "seizures." On each occasion William was present to soothe, to grieve, to bury. Only the youngest, a girl, escaped; she would inherit what remained of the piles of rupees, if anything should happen to William's wife.

Something did. Twenty months after the policy was issued, Mrs. Palmer took "a slight cold," lingered for a month and died—of "complications." An old family physician, who had been helped in his own practice by the obliging young surgeon, who had by then a small but not onerous practice of his own, signed Mrs. Palmer's death certificate. The insurance companies paid.

Now the Palmer stables were enlarge, new horses imported. The punner became a plunger. Bets were increased, losses pyramided. Possibly the well-mannered William told himself there was no need to worry about paying the piper . . . would there not always be more pounds obtainable from the same source . . . the ever obliging insurance companies? At any rate, he splurged on a half-Arabian colt; had there been any psychoanalytic practitioners in that day they might have raised professional eyebrows at the name the dash-

ing surgeon gave his new horse. He entered it as *Strychnine.*

For a short time William's financial fortunes took a turn for the better; at the mid-century mark he seems to have had no urgent need for cash. But the taste of blood had roused the killer-for-insurance. He looked around for a close relative on whom to take out a sizeable policy. His brother, Walter, the one who had succeeded to the active running of the family lumber business, was still close at hand.

Walter had been brooding about the mysterious maladies which had struck down so many of the Staffordshire Palmers in the past eight years; brooding with brandy. He had been, while suffering from *delirium tremens,* under the care of that same "old family physician" who had certified to the death of Marian as "due to complications." But Walter had straightened out . . . with the unselfish help of William . . . and was pronounced a good risk. The policy was issued for twelve thousand pounds.

Walter was lucky; evidently William was holding him in reserve for a rainy day for Walter lived until 1855. During the interim William thoughtfully provided a bodyguard for his brother . . . to see "that nothing happened to him." Nothing did until October 1855 when the bodyguard was given an evening off while William visited with the lumber merchant. That evening Walter must have gotten hold of something that disagreed with him; he was dead by morning.

The whisperings then must have been like the rustling of autumn leaves along the banks of the Trent, for when application was made for the payment of the face value of the policy, the insurance companies refused to issue a checque.

There may have been a dark hour or two when William and the old family physician discussed what to do about that refusal. Should they try to brazen it out and run the risk of an exhumation of Walter's remains?

In the end, William did the worst thing he could have done . . . when dealing with the canny and cautious men of the underwriters. He did nothing.

In London there were no cupped-hand murmurings; there was harsh, loud talk. *Why did not William Palmer press for settlement of his claim if it was just? If it was not just, what could that mean save murder most foul?* The talk went to the constables at Rugely.

The constables shook their heads warily. Accuse the eminent and wealthy surgeon of fratricide? Suggest that the apparently affluent owner of the Palmer Stud, the close friend of Lord Bentick, the most charitable

giver to the parish, was guilty of a crime that might end on the gallows trap?

Better go slowly.

But William, the county squire and racing nabob, could not go slowly. The habits of his thirty-five years were geared to high speed; larger and more frequent plunging. The surgeon gave very little of his time to surgery or medicine, save in the daemonic sense; most of his waking hours were spent in wagering . . . or watching the outcome of the wagers.

In particular he won . . . and more often lost . . . what would have been for that time staggering sums on his horse, *Strychnine.* In November of 1855, only a month after he had watched Walter die in agony, William made a bet of two thousand pounds sterling on *Strychnine* at Shrewsbury against a horse, *Polestar,* owned by a younger man, John Parsons Cook. *Strychnine* was beaten badly.

William was evidently badly hit by the loss of the two thousand pounds, too. He had borrowed from money lenders in London on the basis of the twelve thousand pound policy he had expected to cash in on after Walter's death; those notes were coming due. He had no ready cash to pay Cook the two thousand pounds *Strychnine* had lost for him.

By the exercise of his winning personality he induced Cook to return to Rugely and take temporary lodgings at *The Green Yew.*

There they sat down to serious drinking, brandies and water; loud language and boisterous laughter showed that young Cook, at least, had no great fears for the morrow. But toward the end of that brandy-bout, Palmer was seen by a barmaid to slip out to the corridor leading to the privy and there mix a drink in a glass. Returning to the public room he gave this drink to Cook who downed part of it and immediately cried out that it burned his throat.

While other roisterers watched, Palmer snatched the glass and drank what remained in it, bottoms up. He said he noticed nothing wrong with it. But Cook found enough wrong with it to make him a very sick man indeed. But he lived—next morning he was pale and shaken . . . but not in his confidence toward his good friend William Palmer.

All that day the solicitous surgeon stayed close to his "patient." That evening he had some broth of mutton made in *The Green Yew* kitchen; took it up to his ill friend, himself. Cook tasted it, didn't like the taste, told the chambermaid she might have it, if she cared for it. She did . . . until her first sip

which made her retch "most horribly."

John Parsons Cook was evidently made of sterner stuff for he began to perk up. William took alarm, sent for a Dr. Bamford, a general practitioner in Rugely. Bamford came, saw and had his reservations on diagnosis conquered by the brilliant surgeon who informed him that Cook was having an acute bilious attack. The doctor prescribed and gave to the surgeon some anti-bilious pills for adminstering to the patient.

It is perhaps futile but nevertheless fascinating to speculate on William Palmer's thoughts as he rattled those pills in their cardboard box. The horse that had so grievously let him down. The winner of the wager which couldn't be settled . . . two thousand pounds chargeable to *Strychnine.*

However he may have juggled those thoughts, there is no need to guess about what he did. That is known; he went to the shop of a chemist with whom he seldom dealt and purchased three grains of strychnine. As a medical man he had no need to explain what he meant to use the poison for—nor did he, then or later.

He went back to *The Green Yew* and administered several pills to the thus-far indestructible sporting man. During the time William had been out shopping for strychnine, Cook had felt much better. Had, in fact, received visitors—his trainer and jockey; had discussed with them his visit to the stables next morning. His visit was, of necessity, postponed. An hour after the pill-taking he was having severe muscular spasms.

While in the desperate throes of convulsions, he kept calling . . . for his friend William. The surgeon hurried to his bedside and sat up with him all night. The patient had all the symptoms of what was called lockjaw so there was no possibility of administering more pills. Still, Palmer was a patient man in matters of poisoning.

A study of the subsequent court records leads to the conclusion that William was also suffering . . . from lack of good common caution. Otherwise, how account for the incredible brazenness of his next move—a visit to still another apothecary to buy six grains of strychnine and a small quantity of opium? After which he sent for a second physician, a Dr. Jones of nearby Lutterworth. Jones was a friend of Cook's; he found the durable sportsman much improved.

While Jones, Bamford and Palmer . . . the three eminent medical men . . . were consulting on the nature of Cook's seizures, the constables were also putting their heads together.

The policemen had heard of

Cook's peculiar attacks; they knew of the lost wager. There was a recalling of all the tragedies which had touched William's life—father, father-in-law, mother-in-law, children, wife, brother. The chain of circumstance was getting long enough to hang a man. After due deliberation, the constables decided to take action in the morning, to conduct an investigation and if what they suspected was correct, to charge William with attempted murder. The deliberation cost Cook his life.

Around midnight William—still the faithful attendant on the suffering friend—got Cook to take four more pills. There would have been no fooling with small-bore dosages then; those pills were loaded. Within an hour Cook was screaming in pain, his body arched rigidly, his weight resting solely on the back of his head and his heels. Palmer stroked the sweat-drenched forehead until death brought a merciful release.

Perhaps, for a brief moment, William Palmer thought that strychnine the drug might have evened up matters for *Strychnine* the horse. For he had a forty-eight hour grace-period; Dr. Bamford had *certified death as due to apoplexy.* This was the first of a series of totally unbelievable errors which almost let Palmer go free.

Young Cook's stepfather, George Stevens, came to Rugely to inquire into the unhappy circumstances. He was puzzled by two things: he couldn't find his stepson's betting book; he could not understand why Palmer was so piteously anxious for his friend to be buried instanter.

Stevens demanded a post-mortem examination. It was made in the presence of several medical men, including William. The stomach and intestines were examined by the most distinguished toxicologist of the Eighteen Fifties, a Dr. Taylor. *He certified that no strychnine was present in the body.*

It was not until some time later, when advised of the symptoms preceding Cook's death, that Taylor switched his opinion, stating that death *had* been caused by strychnine.

Palmer, at long last, was arrested. At the coroner's inquest he testified freely, denying any implication in his friend's death. But after his indictment and while awaiting trial, the accumulated suspicions of twelve years boiled up in Rugely. The matter of the failure to press the claim for the policy money due on Walter's death was the topic of pub argument and church bazaar gossip.

The small community boiled itself into a froth of excitement. London papers ran continued

stories of the possible victims of the Strychnine Man. Parliament got into the act by passing a special bill transferring the trial from Staffordshire to the Old Bailey, in London.

The case went to trial in May 1856 and ran for five full court days. Lord Campbell sat as judge and summed up the most damaging evidence against William in this manner:

"You have evidence of strychnia having been procured by the prisoner on the Monday night before the symptoms of strychnia were exhibited by Cook and by the evidence undenied and unquestioned that on Tuesday six grains of strychnia were supplied to the defendant. Supposing that you should come to the conclusion that the symptoms of Cook were inconsistent with death by strychnia; if you think that his symptoms were accounted for by merely natural disease, of course the strychnia obtained by the prisoner on the Monday evening and the Tuesday morning would have no effect. But if you think that the symptoms which Cook exhibited on the Monday and Tuesday nights are consistent with strychnia, then a case is made out on the part of the Crown. After the most anxious consideration I can suggest no possible solution of the purchase of this strychnia. The learned counsel for the prisoner told us in his speech that there was nothing for which he would not account. The learned counsel did not favor us with the theory which he had formed in his own mind with respect to that strychnia.

There is no evidence, there is no suggestion how it was applied, what became of it. That must not influence your verdict unless you come to the conclusion that the symptoms of Cook were consistent with death by strychnia. If you come to that conclusion, I should shrink from my duty, I should be unworthy to sit here, if I did not call your attention to the inference that, if Cook did die by strychnia, it was administered by the prisoner at the bar."

The jury was out an hour and seventeen minutes. It brought in a verdict of guilty of murder.

Before William Palmer walked the thirteen steps to the gallows platform, his head groom, George Bates, made a statement to the effect that his employer had made arrangements to insure Bates' life for five thousand pounds, the face value to be payable to William in event of death.

The well-mannered monster made no attempt to contradict this. But in his will, made in his death cell, he left to George Bates "a certain race horse, namely *Strychnine,* which is no more than his just deserts."

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Two novels of murder — in today's France, and in Tomorrow's strange Outer World.

THERE is a tendency, at times, to talk about "cheap mysteries" as a man we know did the other day, ignoring both the socio-documentary and the enduring quality of much of the writing in this field. While to say this is understandable from those who have a tendency to confuse the sex-cum-sadism school with the field, and to assume that the average mystery novel has been dashed off in a matter of days, to say this is to ignore writers, careful craftsmen, who approach the writing of a mystery novel with no less a sense of dedication than their brother novelist, and with perhaps a greater awareness of the foibles and the strength of their and our neighbors.

A number of these writers share Georges Simenon's extraordinary ability to, it may seem with a few deft brush strokes, make us aware—almost sensually aware—of the fog and the smoke and the cold and the warmth and the quiver of emotion in the "least important" character.

In THE METHODS OF MAIGRET (Doubleday, $2.95), Sime-

This month we explore the possibility that Murder, yesterday as well as Tomorrow, will have similar motivations, and that there will be surprisingly little difference between today's detective, and that of Tomorrow.

non turns again to Paris police procedures and introduces us to a France that few Americans ever come to know.

A fisherman who'd claimed Maigret as a friend—which, in a sense, was true—had been murdered within hours of making the statement. The murder, on sun-swept Porquerolles in the Mediterranean, seemed Maigret's chance to escape the dreary Paris weather despite the fact that, usually, Maigret disliked places where he lost the desire to work. The one fly in the ointment would be the presence of Inspector Pyke of Scotland Yard, who'd come over to Paris to study "the methods of Maigret." Maigret, for his part, didn't quite know how to take the apparently extremely British detective. . . .

It was true that Maigret had known—and had once helped—Marcel Pacaud. And now Pacaud had been murdered. . . . A number of people, like him with their own pasts or with various "business interests" along the Riviera, could have been responsible. There was also the possibility that the killing had been an underworld affair, but this seemed unlikely.

There were clues—shadowy, insubstantive clues, that suggested a third party for whom Pacaud represented a menace. Maigret, his every step, his every frown, studied by the ever-present Inspector Pyke, was to find the answer finally.

This is a carefully drawn portrait of men and women and the background against which they function that breathes with life. . . . There is no papiér maché quality to this France, to this crime, and to this detection. This is Simenon at his best!

A number of years ago the possibility was raised, in professional circles, that writers of mystery novels had certain things in common with their professional brethren in the Science Fiction field. There was an understandable wave of gentle horror at this frightful thought, and some concern at the possibility that plants that walked like men, plus bug-eyed monsters, would invade the mystery and suspense field.

One fact was of course ignored, and this was that Crime—and even Murder—are not likely to disappear with the coming of the mechanistic millenium. There will always be men and women whose ambitions or whose fears will cause them to come into conflict with society; the pious certainty that this is not to be is mildly unrealistic. There will most certainly be need for policemen—need for men specially trained to hunt down offenders against Society.

These may be men—and

teams—like that of Elijah Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw, first met in Isaac Asimov's CAVES OF STEEL and now returning in his THE NAKED SUN (Doubleday, $2.95). Baley is one of latter-day New York's ablest plain-clothesmen, and Olivaw is a disturbingly human-looking robot.

Baley, keenly aware of the hate and disgust for much of what he stands for, finds he can only "view"—not confront physically—his suspects, while the body of the dead man—and the sole witness, a robot—have long since been disposed of. THE NAKED SUN, the story of Baley's successful investigation of the strange murder on the still stranger Solaria, is credible police procedure in a conceivable Tomorrow which should be read by those of you who are bored with formula novels!

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the curse of the golden cross

by . . . G. K. Chesterton

Father Brown faces the puzzle of a strange curse that seems to strike again—and then again, with sinister quickness.

Six people sat round a small table, seeming almost as incongruous and accidental as if they had been shipwrecked separately on the same small desert island. At least the sea surrounded them; for in one sense their island was enclosed in another island, a large and flying island like Laputa. For the little table was one of many little tables dotted about in the dining saloon of that monstrous ship the *MORAVIA,* speeding through the night and the everlasting emptiness of the Atlantic. The little company had nothing in common except that all were traveling from America to England. Two of them at least might be called celebrities; others might be called obscure, and in one or two cases even dubious.

The first was the famous Professor Smaill, an authority on certain archaeological studies touching the later Byzantine Empire. His lectures, delivered in an American University, were accepted as of the first authority even in the most authoritative seats of learning in Europe. His

Essayist, Poet and Playwright, Gilbert Keith Chesterton occupied a unique place in English letters. Although very well known for his many novels, his greatest popularity emanated from his numerous stories about Father Brown, unimpressive little priest who had a talent for attracting violence to himself.

From: The Incredulity of Father Brown, by G. K. Chesterton
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literary works were so steeped in a mellow and imaginative sympathy with the European past, that it often gave strangers a start to hear him speak with an American accent. Yet he was in his way very American; he had long fair hair brushed back from a big square forehead, long straight features and a curious mixture of preoccupation with a poise of potential swiftness, like a lion pondering absent-mindedly on his next leap.

There was only one lady in the group; and she was (as the journalists often said of her) a host in herself; being quite prepared to play hostess, not to say empress, at that or any other table. She was Lady Diana Wales, the celebrated lady traveler in tropical and other countries, but there was nothing rugged or masculine about her appearance at dinner. She was herself handsome in an almost tropical fashion, with a mass of hot and heavy red hair; she was dressed in what the journalists call a daring fashion, but her face was intelligent and her eyes had that bright and rather prominent appearance which belongs to the eyes of ladies who ask questions at political meetings.

The other four figures seemed at first like shadows in this shining presence; but they showed differences on a closer view. One of them was a young man entered on the ship's register as Paul T. Tarrant. He was an American type which might be more truly called an American antitype. Every nation probably has an antitype; a sort of extreme exception that proves the national rule. Americans really respect work, rather as Europeans respect war. There is a halo of heroism about it; and he who shrinks from it is less than a man. The antitype is evident through being exceedingly rare. He is the dandy or dude; the wealthy waster who makes a weak villain for so many American novels. Paul Tarrant seemed to have nothing whatever to do but to change his clothes, which he did about six times a day; passing into paler or richer shades of his suit of exquisite light gray, like the delicate silver changes of the twilight. Unlike most Americans, he cultivated very carefully a short curly beard; and unlike most dandies, even of his own type, he seemed rather sulky than showy. Perhaps there was something almost Byronic about his silence and his gloom.

The next two travelers were naturally classed together; merely because they were both English lecturers returning from an American tour. One of them was described as Leonard Smyth, apparently a minor poet, but something of a major journalist; long-headed, light-haired, per-

fectly dressed and perfectly capable of looking after himself. The other was rather comic contrast, being short and broad with a black walrus mustache, and as taciturn as the other was talkative. But as he had been both charged with robbing and praised for rescuing a Roumanian Princess threatened by a jaguar in his traveling menagerie, and had thus figured in a fashionable case, it was naturally felt that his views on God, progress, his own early life, and the future of Anglo-American relations would be of great interest and value to the inhabitants of Minneapolis and Omaha. The sixth and most insignificant figure was that of a little English priest going by the name of Brown. He listened to the conversation with respectful attention, and he was at that moment forming the impression that there was one rather curious thing about it.

"I suppose those Byzantine studies of yours, Professor," Leonard Smyth was saying, "would throw some light on his story of a tomb found somewhere on the south coast; near Brighton, isn't it? Brighton's a long way from Byzantium of course. But I read something about the style of burying or embalming or something being supposed to be Byzantine."

"Byzantine studies certainly have to reach a long way," replied the Professor dryly. "They talk about specialists; but I think the hardest thing on earth is to specialize. In this case, for instance; how can a man know anything about Byzantium till he knows everything about Rome before it and about Islam after it? Most Arab arts were old Byzantine arts. Why, take algebra—"

"But I won't take algebra," cried the lady decisively. "I never did and I never do. But I'm awfully interested in embalming. I was with Gatton, you know, when he opened the Babylonian tombs. Ever since then I found mummies and preserved bodies and all that perfectly thrilling. Do tell us about this one."

"Gatton was an interesting man," said the Professor. "They were an interesting family. That brother of his who went into Parliament was much more than an ordinary politician. I never understood the Fascisti till he made that speech about Italy."

"Well, we're not going to Italy on this trip," said Lady Diana persistently, "and I believe you're going to that little place where they've found the tomb. In Sussex, isn't it?"

"Sussex is pretty large, as these little English sections go," replied the Professor. "One might wander about in it for a goodish time; and it's a good place to wander in. It's wonder-

ful how large those low hills seem when you're on them."

There was abrupt accidental silence; and then the lady said, "Oh, I'm going on deck," and rose, the men rising with her. But the Professor lingered, and the little priest was the last to leave the table, carefully folding up his napkin. And as they were thus left alone together the Professor said suddenly to his companion:

"What would you say was the point of that little talk?"

"Well," said Father Brown smiling, "since you ask me, there was something that amused me a little. I may be wrong; but it seemed to me that the company made three attempts to get you to talk about an embalmed body said to be found in Sussex. And you, on your side, very courteously offered to talk—first about algebra, and then about the Fascisti, and then about the landscape of Downs."

"In short," replied the Professor, "you thought I was ready to talk about any subject but that one. You were quite right."

The Professor was silent, for a little time, looking down at the tablecloth; then he looked up and spoke with that swift impulsiveness that suggested the lion's leap.

"See here, Father Brown," he said. "I consider you about the wisest man I ever met."

Father Brown was very English. He had all the normal national helplessness about what to do with a serious and sincere compliment suddenly handed to him to his face, in the American manner. His reply was a meaningless murmur; and it was the Professor who proceeded, with the same staccato earnestness:

"You see, up to a point it's all simple enough. A Christian tomb of the Dark Ages, apparently that of a bishop, has been found under a little church at Dulham on the Sussex coast. The Vicar happened to be a good bit of an archaeologist himself and has been able to find out a good deal more than I know yet. There was a rumor of the corpse being embalmed in a way peculiar to Greeks and Egyptians but unknown in the West, especially at that date. So Mr. Walters (that is the Vicar) naturally wonders about Byzantine influences. But he also mentions something else, that is of even more personal interest to me."

His long grave face seemed to grow even longer and graver as he frowned down at the tablecloth. His long finger seemed to be tracing patterns on it like the plans of dead cities and their temples and tombs.

"So I'm going to tell you, and nobody else, why it is I have to be careful about mentioning that matter in mixed company; and why the more eager they are to talk about it, the more

cautious I have to be. It is also stated that in the coffin is a chain with a cross, common enough to look at, but with a certain secret symbol on the back found on only one other cross in the world. It is from the arcana of the very earliest Church and is supposed to indicate St. Peter setting up his See at Antioch before he came to Rome. Anyhow, I believe there is but one other like it, and it belongs to me. I hear there is some story about a curse on it; but I take no notice of that. But whether or no there is a curse, there really is in one sense a conspiracy; though the conspiracy should only consist of one man."

"Of one man?" repeated Father Brown almost mechanically.

"Of one madman for all I know," said Professor Smaill. "It's a long story and in some ways a silly one."

He paused again, still tracing plans like architectural drawings with his finger on the cloth and then resumed:

"Perhaps I had better tell you about it from the beginning, in case you see some little point in the story that is meaningless to me. It began years and years ago, when I was conducting some investigations on my own account in the antiquities of Crete and the Greek islands. I did a great deal of it practically single-handed; sometimes with the most rude and temporary help from the inhabitants of the place, and sometimes literally alone. It was under the latter circumstances that I found a maze of subterranean passages which led at last to a heap of rich refuse, broken ornaments and scattered gems which I took to be the ruins of some sunken altar, and in which I found the curious gold cross. I turned it over and on the back of it I saw the Ichthus or fish, which was an early Christian symbol, but of a shape and pattern rather different from that commonly found; and as it seemed to me, more realistic, more as if the archaic designer had meant it to be not merely a conventional enclosure or nimbus, but to look a little more like a real fish. It seemed to me that there was a flattening towards one end of it that was not like mere mathematical decoration, but rather like a sort of rude or even savage zoology.

"In order to explain very briefly why I thought this find important, I must tell you the point of the excavation. For one thing, it had something of the nature of an excavation of an excavation. We were on the track not only of antiquities, but of the antiquarians of antiquity. We had reason to believe, or some of us thought we had reason to believe, that these underground passages, mostly of the Minoan

period, like that famous one which is actually identified with the labyrinth of the Minotaur, had not really been lost and left undisturbed for all the ages between the Minotaur and the modern explorer. We believed that these underground places, I might almost say these underground towns and villages, had already been penetrated during the intervening periods by persons prompted by some motive. About the motive there were different schools of thought; some holding that the Emperors had ordered an official exploration out of mere scientific curiosity; others that the furious fashion in the later Roman Empire for all sorts of lurid Asiatic superstitions had started some nameless Manichean sect or other rioting in the caverns in orgies that had to be hidden from the face of the sun. I belong to the group which believed that these caverns have been used in the same way as the catacombs. That is, we believed that, during some of the persecutions which spread like fire over the whole Empire, the Christians had concealed themselves in these ancient pagan labyrinths of stone. It was therefore with a thrill as sharp as a thunderclap that I found and picked up the fallen golden cross and saw the design upon it; and it was with still more of a shock of felicity that, on turning to make my way once more outwards and upwards into the light of day, I looked up at the walls of bare rock that extended endlessly along the low passages; and saw scratched in yet ruder outline, but if possible more unmistakable, the shape of the Fish.

"Something about it made it seem as if it might be a fossil fish or some rudimentary organism fixed for ever in a frozen sea. I could not analyze this analogy, otherwise unconnected with a mere drawing scratched or scrawled upon the stone, till I realized that I was saying in my subconscious mind that the first Christians must have seemed something like fish, dumb and dwelling in a fallen world of twilight and silence, dropped far below the feet of men and moving in dark and twilight and a soundless world.

"Everyone walking along stone passages knows what it is to be followed by phantom feet. The echo follows flapping or clapping behind or in front, so that it is almost impossible for the man who is really lonely to believe in his loneliness. I had got used to the effects of this echo and had not noticed it much for some time past, when I caught sight of the symbolical shape scrawled on the wall of rock. I stopped, and at the same instant it seemed as if my heart stopped, too. For my own feet

had halted; but the echo went marching on.

"I ran forward and it seemed as if the ghostly footsteps ran also, but not with that exact imitation which marks the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

"It came round the corner of a rock just in front of me; and throughout that uncanny chase I noticed that it was always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way to the first white gleam of daylight and even there I could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the purity of the rock, like that oriental invasion that has spread sporadically over the fall of classic Hellas. I looked out on a sea of stainless blue and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of man.

"It had been a terrible conversation; so intimate and so individual and in a sense so casual.

"This strange being, bodiless, faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had told me also that he would unquestionably kill me or any other man who came into the possession of the cross with the mark of the fish. He told me frankly he was not fool enough to attack me there in the labyrinth, knowing I had a loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me equally calmly that he would plan my murder with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a lifetime. Yet he was no Oriental; I am certain he was

a white man. I suspect that he was a countryman of my own.

"Since then I have received from time to time signs and symbols and queer impersonal messages that have made me certain at least that if the man is a maniac, he is a monomaniac. He is always telling me, in this airy and detached way, that the preparations for my death and burial are proceeding satisfactorily; and that the only way in which I can prevent their being crowned with a comfortable success is to give up the relic in my possession; the unique cross that I found in the cavern. He does not seem to have any religious sentiment or fanaticism on the point; he seems to have no passion but the passion of a collector of curiosities. That is one of the things that makes me feel sure he is a man of the West and not of the East. But this particular curiosity seems to have driven him quite crazy.

"And then came this report, as yet unsubstantiated, about the duplicate relic found on an embalmed body in a Sussex tomb. If he had been a maniac before, this news turned him into a demoniac possessed of seven devils. That there should be one of them belonging to another man was bad enough, but that there should be two of them and neither belonging to him was a torture not to be borne. His mad messages began to come thick and fast like showers of poisoned arrows, and each cried out more confidently than the last that my death would strike me at the moment when I stretched out my unworthy hand towards the cross in the tomb.

" 'You will never know me,' he wrote, 'you will never say my name; you will never see my face; you will die and never know who has killed you. I may be in any form among those about you; but I shall be in that alone at which you have forgotten to look.'

"From those threats I deduce that he is quite likely to shadow me on this expedition; and try to steal the relic or do me some mischief for possessing it. But as I never saw the man in my life, he may be almost any man I meet. Logically speaking, he may be any of the waiters who wait on me at table. He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table."

"He may be me," said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar.

"He may be anybody else," answered Smaill seriously. "That is what I meant by what I said just now. You are the only man I feel sure is not the enemy."

Father Brown again looked embarrassed; then he smiled and said, "Well, oddly enough, I'm not. What we have to consider is any chance of finding out if he really is here before he—

before he makes himself unpleasant."

"There is one chance of finding out, I think," remarked the Professor rather grimly. "When we get to Southampton I shall take a car at once along the coast; I should be glad if you would come with me, but in the ordinary sense of course our little party will break up. If any one of them turns up again in that little churchyard on the Sussex coast, we shall know who he really is."

The Professor's programme was duly carried out, at least to the extent of the car and its cargo in the form of Father Brown. They coasted along the road with the sea on one side and the hills of Hampshire and Sussex on the other; nor was there visible to the eye any shadow of pursuit. As they approached the village of Dulham only one man crossed their path who had any connection with the matter in hand; a journalist who had just visited the church and been courteously escorted by the vicar through the newly excavated chapel; but his remarks and notes seemed to be of the ordinary newspaper sort. But Professor Smaill was perhaps a little fanciful and could not dismiss the sense of something odd and discouraging in the attitude and appearance of the man, who was tall and shabby, hook-nosed and hollow-eyed, with mustache that drooped with depression. He seemed anything but enlivened by his late experiment as a sightseer; indeed, he seemed to be striding as fast as possible from the sight, when they stopped him with a question.

"It's all about a curse," he said, "a curse on the place, according to the guide-book or the parson or the oldest inhabitant or whoever is the authority; and really, it feels jolly like it. Curse or no curse, I'm glad to have got out of it."

"Do you believe in curses?" asked Smaill curiously.

"I don't believe in anything; I'm a journalist," answered the melancholy being; "Boon, of the *Daily Wire*. But there's a something creepy about that crypt; and I'll never deny I felt a chill." And he strode on towards the railway station with a further accelerated pace.

"Looks like a raven or a crow, that fellow," observed Smaill as they turned towards the churchyard. "What is it they say about a bird of ill-omen?"

They entered the churchyard slowly, the eyes of the American antiquary lingering luxuriantly over the isolated roof of the lych gate and the large unfathomable black growth of the yew looking like night itself defying the broad daylight. The path climbed up amid heaving levels of turf in which the gravestones were tilted at all

angles like stone rafts tossed on a green sea, till it came to the ridge beyond which the great gray sea itself ran like an iron bar, with pale lights in it like steel. Almost at their feet the tough rank grass turned into a tuft of sea-holly while, outlined darkly against the steely sea, stood a motionless figure. But for its dark gray clothing it might almost have been the statue on some sepulchral monument. But Father Brown instantly recognized something in the elegant stoop of the shoulders and the rather sullen outward thrust of the short beard.

"Gee," exclaimed the professor of archaeology, "it's that man Tarrant, if you call him a man. Did you think, when I spoke on the boat, that I should ever get so quick an answer to my question?"

"I thought you might get too many answers to it," answered Father Brown.

"Why, how do you mean?" inquired the Professor, darting a look at him over his shoulder.

"I mean," answered the other mildly, "that I thought I hear voices behind the yew-tree. I don't think Mr. Tarrant is so solitary as he looks."

Even as Tarrant turned slowly round in his moody manner, the confirmation came. Another voice, high and rather hard, but none the less feminine, was saying with experienced raillery:

"And how was I to know he would be here?"

It was borne in upon Professor Smaill that this gay observation was not addressed to him; so he was forced to conclude in some bewilderment, that yet a third person was present. As Lady Diana Wales came out, radiant and resolute as ever, from the shadow of the yew, he noted grimly that she had a living shadow of her own. The lean dapper figure of Leonard Smyth, that insinuating man of letters, appeared immediately behind her own flamboyant form, smiling, his head a little on one side like a dog's.

"Snakes!" muttered Smaill. "Why, they're all here. Or all except that little showman with the walrus whiskers."

He heard Father Brown laughing softly beside him; and indeed the situation was becoming something more than laughable. It seemed to be turning topsy-turvy and tumbling about their ears like a pantomime trick; for even while the Professor had been speaking, his words had received the most comical contradiction. The round head with the grotesque black crescent of mustache had appeared suddenly and seemingly out of a hole in the ground. An instant afterwards they realized that the hole was in fact a very large hole, leading to a ladder which descended into the bowels of the

earth; that it was in fact the entrance to the subterranean scene they had come to visit. The little man had been the first to find the entrance and had already descended a rung or two of the ladder before he put his head out again to address his fellow-travelers. He looked like some particularly preposterous Grave-Digger in a burlesque of "Hamlet." He only said thickly behind his thick mustaches, "It is down here." But it came to the rest of the company with a start of realization that, though they had sat opposite him at meal-times for a week, they had hardly ever heard him speak before; and that though he was supposed to be an English lecturer, he spoke with a rather occult foreign accent.

"You see, my dear Professor," cried Lady Diana with trenchant cheerfulness, "your Byzantine mummy was simply too exciting to be missed. I simply had to come along and see it; and I'm sure the gentlemen felt just the same. Now you must tell us all about it."

"I do not know all about it," said the Professor gravely, not to say grimly. "In some respects I don't even know what it's all about. It certainly seems odd that we should have all met again so soon; but I suppose there are no limits to the modern thirst for information. But if we are all to visit the place it must be done in a responsible way and, if you will forgive me, under responsible leadership. We must notify whoever is in charge of the excavations; we shall probably at least have to put our names in a book."

Something rather like a wrangle followed on this collision between the impatience of the lady and the suspicions of the archaeologist; but the latter's insistence on the official rights of the vicar and the local investigation ultimately prevailed; the little man with the mustache came reluctantly out of his grave again and silently acquiesced in a less impetuous descent. Fortunately, the clergyman himself appeared at this stage, a gray-haired, good-looking gentleman with a droop accentuated by double eyeglasses; and while rapidly establishing sympathetic relations with the Professor as a fellow antiquarian, did not seem to regard his rather motley group of companions with anything more hostile than amusement.

"I hope you are none of you superstitious," he said pleasantly. "I ought to tell you, to start with, that there are supposed to be all sorts of bad omens and curses hanging over our devoted heads in this business. I have just been deciphering a Latin inscription which was found over the entrance to the chapel; and it would seem that there are no less than three curses

involved; a curse for entering the sealed chamber, a double curse for opening the coffin, and a triple and most terrible curse for touching the gold relic found inside it. The two first maledictions I have already incurred myself," he added with a smile, "but I fear that even you will have to incur the first and mildest of them, if you are to see anything at all. According to the story, the curses descend in a rather lingering fashion, at long intervals and on later occasions. I don't know whether that is any comfort to you." And the Reverend Mr. Walters smiled once more in his drooping and benevolent manner.

"Story," repeated Professor Smaill, "why, what story is that?"

"It is rather a long story and varies, like other local legends," answered the vicar. "But it is undoubtedly contemporary with the time of the tomb; and the substance of it is embodied in the inscription and is roughly this: Guy de Gisors, a lord of the manor here early in the thirteenth century, had set his heart on a beautiful black horse in the possession of an envoy from Genoa, which that practical merchant prince would not sell except for a huge price. Guy was driven by avarice to the crime of pillaging the shrine and, according to one story, even killing the Bishop, who was then resident there. Anyhow, the Bishop uttered a curse which was to fall on anybody who should continue to withhold the gold cross from its resting-place in his tomb, or should take steps to disturb it when it had returned there. The feudal lord raised the money for the horse by selling the gold relic to a goldsmith in the town; but on the first day he mounted the horse the animal reared and threw him in front of the church porch, breaking his neck. Meanwhile the goldsmith, hitherto wealthy and prosperous, was ruined by a series of inexplicable accidents, and fell into the power of a money-lender living the manor. Eventually the unfortunate goldsmith, faced with nothing but starvation, hanged himself on an apple-tree. The gold cross with all his other goods, his house, shop, and tools, had long ago passed into the possession of the money-lender. Meanwhile the son and heir of the feudal lord, shocked by the judgment on his blasphemous sire, had become a religious devotee in the dark and stern spirit of those times, and conceived it his duty to persecute all heresy and unbelief among his vassals. Thus the money lender in his turn, who had been cynically tolerated by the father, was ruthlessly burnt by order of the son; so that he in his turn suffered for the possession of the relic; and after

these three judgments, it was returned to the Bishop's tomb; since when no eye has seen and no hand has touched it."

Lady Diana Wales seemed to be more impressed than might have been expected.

"It really gives one rather a shiver," she said, "to think that we are going to be the first, except the vicar."

The pioneer with the big mustaches and the broken English did not descend after all by his favorite ladder, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody's breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion; and it was in an unknown tongue.

They came out in a circular chamber like a basilica in a ring of round arches; for that chapel had been built before the first pointed arch of the Gothic had pierced our civilization like a spear. A glimmer of greenish light between some of the pillars marked the place of the other opening into the world above; and gave a vague sense of being under the sea, which was intensified by one or two other incidental and perhaps fanciful resemblances. For the dog-tooth pattern of the Norman was faintly traceable round all the arches, giving them, above the cavernous darkness, something of the look of the mouths of monstrous sharks. And in the center the dark bulk of the tomb itself, with its lifted lid of stone, might almost have been the jaws of some such leviathan.

Whether out of a sense of fitness or from the lack of more modern appliances, the clerical antiquary had arranged for the illumination of the chapel only by four tall candles in big wooden candlesticks standing on the floor. Of these only one was alight when they entered, casting a faint glimmer over the mighty architectural forms; when they had all assembled, the clergyman proceeded to light the three others; and the appearance and contents of the great sarcophagus came more clearly into view.

All eyes went first to the face of the dead, preserved across all those ages in the lines of life by

some secret eastern process, it was said, inherited from heathen antiquity and unknown to the simple graveyards of our own island. The Professor could hardly repress an exclamation of wonder; for though the face was as pale as a mask of wax, it looked otherwise like a sleeping man who had but that moment closed his eyes. The face was of the ascetic, perhaps even the fanatical type, with a high framework of bones; the figure was clad in a golden cope and gorgeous vestments, and high up on the breast, at the base of the throat, glittered the famous gold cross upon a short gold chain, or rather necklace. The stone coffin had been opened by lifting the lid of it at the head and propping it aloft upon two strong wooden shafts or poles, hitched above under the edge of the upper slab and wedged below into the corners of the coffin behind the head of the corpse. Less could therefore be seen of the feet or the lower part of the figure; but the candlelight shone full on the face; and in contrast with its tones of dead ivory the cross of gold seemed to stir and sparkle like a fire.

Professor Smaill's big forehead had carried a big furrow of reflection, or possibly of worry, ever since the clergyman had told the story of the curse. But feminine intuition, not untouched by feminine hysteria, understood the meaning of his brooding immobility better than did the men around him. In the silence of that candle-lit cavern Lady Diana cried out suddenly:

"Don't touch it, I tell you!"

But the man had already made one of his swift leonine movements, leaning forward over the body. The next instant they all darted, some forward and some backward, but all with a dreadful ducking motion as if the sky were falling.

As the Professor laid a finger on the gold cross, the wooden props, that bent very lightly in supporting the lifted lid of stone, seemed to jump and straighten themselves with a jerk. The lip of the stone slab slipped from its wooden perch; and in all their souls and stomachs came a sickening sense of down-rushing ruin, as if they had all been flung off a precipice. Smaill had withdrawn his head swiftly, but not in time; and he lay senseless beside the coffin, in a red puddle of blood from scalp or skull. And the old stone coffin was once more closed as it had been for centuries; save that one or two sticks or splinters stuck in the crevice, horribly suggestive of bones crunched by an ogre. The leviathan had snapped its jaws of stone.

Lady Diana was looking at the wreck with eyes that had an electric glare as of lunacy; her red hair looked scarlet against

the pallor of her face in the greenish twilight. Smyth was looking at her, still with something dog-like in the turn of his head; but it was the expression of a dog who looks at a master whose catastrophe he can only partly understand. Tarrant and the foreigner had stiffened in their usual sullen attitudes; but their faces had turned the color of clay. The vicar seemed to have fainted. Father Brown was kneeling beside the fallen figure, trying to rest its condition.

Rather to the general surprise, the Byronic lounger, Paul Tarrant, came forward to help him.

"He'd better be carried up into the air," he said. "I suppose there's just a chance for him."

"He isn't dead," said Father Brown in a low voice, "but I think it's pretty bad; you aren't a doctor, by any chance?"

"No, but I've had to pick up a good many things in my time," said the other. "But never mind about me just now. My real profession would probably surprise you."

"I don't think so," replied Father Brown, with a slight smile. "I thought of it about halfway through the voyage. You are a detective shadowing somebody. Well, the cross is safe from thieves now, anyhow."

While they were speaking Tarrant had lifted the frail figure of the fallen man with easy strength and dexterity and was carefully carrying him towards the exit. He answered over his shoulder, "Yes, the cross is safe enough."

"You mean that nobody else is," replied Brown. "Are you thinking of the curse, too?"

Father Brown went about for the next hour or two under a burden of frowning perplexity that was something beyond the shock of the tragic accident. He assisted in carrying the victim to the little inn opposite the church, interviewed the doctor, who reported the injury as serious and threatening, though not certainly fatal, and carried the news to the little group of travelers who had gathered round the table in the inn parlor. But wherever he went the cloud of mystification rested on him and seemed to grow darker the more deeply he pondered. For the central mystery was growing more and more mysterious, actually in proportion as many of the minor mysteries began to clear themselves up in his mind. Exactly in proportion as the meaning of individual figures in that motley group began to explain itself, the thing that had happened grew more and more difficult to explain. Leonard Smyth had come merely because Lady Diana had come; and Lady Diana had come merely because she chose. They were engaged in one of those floating society

flirtations that are all the more silly for being semi-intellectual. But the lady's romanticism had a superstitious side to it; and she was pretty well prostrated by the terrible end of her adventure. Paul Tarrant was a private detective, possibly watching the flirtation, for some wife or husband; possibly shadowing the foreign lecturer with the mustaches, who had much the air of an undesirable alien. But if he or anybody else had intended to steal the relic, the intention had been finally frustrated. And, to all mortal appearance, what had frustrated it was either an incredible coincidence or the intervention of the ancient curse.

As he stood in unusual perplexity in the middle of the village street, between the inn and the church, he felt a mild shock of surprise at seeing a recently familiar but rather unexpected figure advancing up the street. Mr. Boon, the journalist, looking very haggard in the sunshine, which showed up his shabby raiment like that of a scarecrow, had his dark and deep-set eyes (rather close together on each side of the long drooping nose) fixed on the priest. The latter looked twice before he realized that the heavy dark mustache hid something like a grin or at least a grim smile.

"I thought you were going away," said Father Brown a little sharply. "I thought you left by that train two hours ago."

"Well, you see I didn't," said Boon.

"Why have you come back?" asked the priest almost sternly.

"This is not the sort of little rural paradise for a journalist to leave in a hurry," replied the other. "Things happen too fast here to make it worth while to go back to a dull place like London. Besides, they can't keep me out of the affair—I mean this second affair. It was I that found the body, or at any rate the clothes. Quite suspicious conduct on my part, wasn't it? Perhaps you think I wanted to dress up in his clothes. Shouldn't I make a lovely parson?"

And the lean and long-nosed mountebank suddenly made an extravagant gesture in the middle of the market-place, stretching out his arms and spreading out his dark gloved hands in a sort of burlesque benediction and saying, "Oh, my dear brethren and sisters, for I would embrace you all . . ."

"What on earth are you talking about?" cried Father Brown, and rapped the stones slightly with his stumpy umbrella, for he was a little less patient than usual.

"Oh, you'll find out all about it if you ask that picnic party of yours at the inn," replied Boon scornfully. "That man Tarrant seems to suspect me merely be-

cause I found the clothes; though he only came up a minute too late to find them himself. But there are all sorts of mysteries in this business. The little man with the big mustaches may have more in him than meets the eye. For that matter, I don't see why you shouldn't have killed the poor fellow yourself."

Father Brown did not seem in the least annoyed at the suggestion, but he seemed exceedingly bothered and bewildered by the remark.

"Do you mean," he asked with simplicity, "that it was I who tried to kill Professor Smaill?"

"Not at all," said the other, waving his hand with the air, of one making a handsome concession. "Plenty of dead people for you to choose among. Not limited to Professor Smaill. Why, didn't you know somebody else had turned up, a good deal deader than Professor Smaill? And I don't see why you should not have done him in in a quiet way. Religious differences, you know . . . lamentable disunion of Christendom . . . I suppose you've always wanted to get the English parishes back."

"I'm going back to the inn," said the priest quietly; "you say the people there know what you mean; and perhaps *they* may be able to say it."

In truth just afterwards his private perplexities suffered a momentary dispersal at the news of a new calamity. The moment he entered the little parlor where the rest of the company were collected, something in their pale faces told him they were shaken by something yet more recent than the accident at the tomb. Even as he entered Leonard Smyth was saying: "Where is all this going to end?"

"It will never end, I tell you," repeated Lady Diana, gazing into vacancy with glassy eyes; "it will never end till we all end. One after another the curse will take us; perhaps slowly, as the poor vicar said; but it will take us all as it has taken him."

"What in the world has happened now?" asked Father Brown.

There was a silence, and then Tarrant said in a voice that sounded a little hollow:

"Mr. Walters, the vicar, has committed suicide. I suppose it was the shock unhinged him. But I fear there can be no doubt about it. We've just found his black hat and clothes on a rock jutting out from the shore. He seems to have jumped into the sea. I thought he looked as if it had knocked him half-witted, and perhaps we ought to have looked after him; but there was so much to look after."

"You could have done nothing," said the lady; "don't you see the thing is dealing doom in a sort of dreadful order? The

Professor touched the cross and he went first; the vicar had opened the tomb and he went second; we only entered the chapel and we—"

"Hold on," said Father Brown, in a sharp voice he very seldom used; "this has got to stop."

He still wore a heavy, though unconscious frown, but in his eyes was no longer the cloud of mystification, but a light of almost terrible understanding.

"What a fool I am!" he muttered. "I ought to have seen it long ago. The tale of the curse ought to have told me."

"Do you mean to say," demanded Tarrant, "that we can really be killed now by something that happened in the thirteenth century?"

Father Brown shook his head and answered with quiet emphasis:

"I won't discuss whether we can be killed by something that happened in the thirteenth century. But I'm jolly certain that we can't be killed by something that *never* happened in the thirteenth century; something that never happened at all."

"Well," said Tarrant. "It's refreshing to find a priest so sceptical of the supernatural as all that."

"Not at all," replied the priest calmly; "it's not the supernatural part I doubt. It's the natural part. I'm exactly in the position of the man who said, 'I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable.'"

"That's what you call a paradox, isn't it?" asked the other.

"It's what I call common sense, properly understood," replied Father Brown. "It really is more natural to believe a preternatural story, that deals with things we don't understand, than a natural story that contradicts things we do understand. Tell me that the great Mr. Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr. Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it's only incredible. But I'm much more certain it didn't happen then that Parnell's ghost didn't appear; because it violates the laws of the world I do understand. So it is with that tale of the curse. It isn't the legend that I disbelieve. It's the history."

Lady Diana had recovered a little from her trance of Cassandra, and her perennial curiosity about new things began to peer once more out of her bright and prominent eyes.

"What a curious man you are!" she said. "Why should you disbelieve the history?"

"I disbelieve the history, because it isn't history," answered Father Brown. "To anybody who happens to know a little about the Middle Ages, the whole story was about as probable as Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar. But does anybody know anything about the Middle Ages? Do you know what a Guild was? Have you ever heard of *Salvo Regis?*"

"No, of course I don't," said the lady rather crossly. "What a lot of Latin words!"

"No, of course," said Father Brown. "If it had been Tutankhamen and a set of dried-up Egyptians preserved, heaven knows why, at the other end of the world; if it had been Babylonia or China; if it had been some race as remote and mysterious as the Man in the Moon, your newspapers would have told you all about it, down to the last discovery of a toothbrush or a collarstud. But the men who built your own parish churches, and gave the names to your own towns and trades and the very roads you walk on; it has never occurred to you to know anything about them. I don't claim to know a lot myself; but I know enough to see that story is stuff and nonsense from the beginning to end. It was illegal for a money-lender to distrain on a man's shop and tools. It's exceedingly unlikely that the Guild would not have saved a man from such utter ruin, especially if he were ruined by a foreigner. The people had vices and tragedies of their own; they sometimes tortured and burned people. But that idea of a man, without God or hope in the world, crawling away to die because nobody cared whether he lived—that isn't a mediaeval idea. That's a product of our economic science and progress. The money lender wouldn't have been a vassal of the feudal lord. They normally had a special position as servants of the King. Above all, he couldn't possibly have been burned for his religion."

"The Paradoxes are multiplying," observed Tarrant, "but surely you won't deny that they were persecuted in the Middle Ages?"

"It would be nearer the truth," said Father Brown, "to say they were the only people who weren't persecuted in the Middle Ages. If you want to satirize mediaevalism, you could make a good case by saying that some poor Christian might be burned alive for making a mistake about Homoousian, while a rich non-Christian might walk down the street openly sneering at Christ and the Mother of God. Well, that's what the story is like. It was never a story of the Middle Ages; it was never even a legend about the Middle Ages. It was made up by some-

body whose notions came from novels and newspapers; and probably made up on the spur of the moment."

The others seemed a little dazed by the historical digression, and seemed to wonder vaguely why the priest emphasized it and made it so important a part of the puzzle. But Tarrant, whose trade it was to pick the practical detail out of many tangles of digression, had suddenly become alert. His bearded chin was thrust forward farther than ever, but his sullen eyes were wide awake.

"Ah," he said, "made up on the spur of the moment!"

"Perhaps that is an exaggeration," admitted Father Brown calmly. "I should rather say made up much more casually and carelessly than the rest of an uncommonly careful plot. But the plotter did not think the details of mediaeval history would matter much to anybody. And his calculation in a general way was pretty nearly right, like most of his other calculations."

"Whose calculations? Who was right?" demanded the lady with a sudden passion of impatience. "Who is this person you are talking about? Haven't we gone through enough, without your making our flesh creep with your hes and hims?"

"I am talking about the murderer," said Father Brown.

"What murderer?" she asked sharply. "Do you mean that the poor professor was murdered?"

"Well," said the staring Tarrant gruffly into his beard, "we can't say 'murdered,' for we don't know he's killed."

"The murderer killed somebody else, who was not Professor Smaill," said the priest gravely.

"Why, whom else could he kill?" asked the other."

"He killed the Reverend John Walters, the Vicar of Dulham," replied Father Brown with precision. "He only wanted to kill those two because they both had got hold of relics of one rare pattern. The murderer was a sort of monomaniac on the point."

"It all sounds very strange," muttered Tarrant. "Of course we can't swear that the vicar's really dead either. We haven't seen his body."

"Oh yes, you have," said Father Brown.

There was a silence as the stroke of a gong; a silence in which that sub-conscious guesswork that was so active and accurate in the woman moved her almost to a shriek.

"That is exactly what you have seen," went on the priest. "You have seen his body. You haven't seen him, the real living man; but you have seen his body all right. You have stared at it hard by the light of four great candles; and it was not tossing suicidally in the sea, but lying

in state like a Prince of the Church in a shrine built before the Crusades."

"In plain words," said Tarrant, "you actually ask us to believe that the embalmed body was really the corpse of a murdered man."

Father Brown was silent for a moment; then he said almost with an air of irrelevance:

"The first thing I noticed about it was the cross; or rather the string suspending the cross. Naturally, for most of you, it was only a string of beads and nothing else in particular, but, naturally also, it was rather more in my line than yours. You remember it lay close up to the chin, with only a few beads showing, as if the whole necklet were quite short. But the beads that showed were arranged in a special way; first one and then three and so on; in fact, I knew at a glance that it was a rosary, an ordinary rosary with a cross at the end of it. But a rosary has at least five decades and additional beads as well; and I naturally wondered where all the rest of it was. It would go much more than once round the old man's neck. I couldn't understand it at the time; and it was only afterwards I guessed where the extra length had gone to. It was coiled round and round the foot of the wooden prop that was fixed in the corner of the coffin, holding up the lid. So that when poor Smaill merely plucked at the cross, it jerked the prop out of its place and the lid fell on his skull like a club of stone."

"By George!" said Tarrant, "I'm beginning to think there's something in what you say. This is a queer story if it's true."

"When I realized that," went on Father Brown, "I could manage more or less to guess the rest. Remember, first of all, that there never was any responsible archaeological authority for anything more than investigation. Poor old Walters was an honest antiquary, who was engaged in opening the tomb to *find out* if there was any truth in the legend about embalmed bodies. The rest was all rumor, of the sort that often anticipates or exaggerates such finds. As a fact, he found the body had not been embalmed, but had fallen into dust long ago. Only while he was working there by the light of his lonely candle in that sunken chapel, the candlelight threw another shadow that was not his own."

"Ah!" cried Lady Diana with a catch in her breath; "and I know what you mean now. You mean to tell us we have met the murderer, talked and joked with the murderer, let him tell us a romantic tale, and let him depart untouched."

"Leaving his clerical disguise on a rock," assented Brown. "It

is all dreadfully simple. This man got ahead of the Professor in the race to the churchyard and chapel, possibly while the Professor was talking to that lugubrious journalist. He came on the old clergyman beside the empty coffin and killed him. Then he dressed himself in the black clothes from the corpse, wrapped it in an old cope which had been among the real finds of the exploration and put it in the coffin, arranging the rosary and the wooden support as I have described. Then, having thus set the trap for his second enemy, he went up into the daylight and greeted us all with the most amiable politeness of a country clergyman."

"I'll admit he was very lucky," growled Tarrant; "and who the devil was he?"

"As you say, he was very lucky," answered Father Brown, "and not least in that respect. For that is the one thing we may never know."

He frowned at the table for a moment and then went on: "This fellow has been hovering round and threatening for years, but the one thing he was careful of was to keep the secret of who he was; and he has kept it still. But if poor Smaill recovers, as I think he will, it is pretty safe to say that you will hear more of it."

"Why, what will Professor Smaill do, do you think?"

"I should think the first thing he would do," said Tarrant, "would be to put the detectives on like dogs after this murdering devil."

"Well," said Father Brown, smiling suddenly after his long fit of frowning perplexity; "I think I know the very first thing he ought to do."

"And what is that?"

"He ought to apologize to all of you," said Father Brown.

It was not upon this point however, that Father Brown found himself talking to Professor Smaill as he sat by the bedside during the slow convalescence of that eminent archaeologist. Nor indeed was it chiefly Father Brown who did the talking; for though the Professor was limited to small doses of the stimulant of conversation, he concentrated most of it upon these interviews with his clerical friend. Father Brown had a talent for being silent in an encouraging way. And Smaill was encouraged by it to talk about morbid phases of recovery and the monstrous dreams that often accompany delirium. It is often rather an unbalancing business to recover slowly from a bad knock on the head; and when the head is as interesting a head as that of Professor Smaill even its disturbances and distortions are apt to be original and curious. His dreams were like bold and big designs rather out of

drawing, as they can be seen in the strong but stiff archaic arts that he had studied; they were full of strange saints with square and triangular haloes, of golden outstanding crowns and glories round dark and flattened faces, of eagles out of the east and the high headdresses of bearded men with their hair bound like women. Only, as he told his friend, there was one much simpler and less entangled type that continually recurred to his imaginative memory. Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once looked up and saw, in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.

"And at last," he said, "I think I have seen a meaning in the picture and the voice; and one that I never understood before. Why should I worry because one madman among a million of sane men, leagued in a great society against him, chooses to brag of persecuting me or pursuing me to death? The man who drew in the dark catacomb the secret symbol of Christ was persecuted in a very different fashion. He was the solitary madman; the whole sane society was leagued together not to save but to slay him. I have sometimes fussed and fidgeted and wondered whether this or that man was my persecutor; whether it was Tarrant; whether it was Leonard Smyth; whether it was any one of them! Suppose it had been all of them! Suppose it had been all the men on the boat and the men on the train and the men in the village. Suppose, so far as I was concerned, they were all murderers. I thought I had a right to be alarmed because I was creeping through the bowels of the earth in the dark and there was a man who would destroy me. What would it have been like, if the destroyer had been up in the daylight and had owned all the earth and commanded all the armies and the crowds? How if he had been able to stop all the earths or smoke me out of my hole or kill me the moment I put my nose out in the daylight? What was it like to deal with murder on that scale? The world has forgotten these things; as until a little while ago it had forgotten war."

"Yes," said Father Brown, "the war came. The fish may be driven underground again, but it will come up in the daylight again. As St. Anthony of Padua humorously remarked, it is only fishes who survive the Deluge."

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